

THE AUTHOR'S MIND



LAWRENCE H. CONRAD











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Laurence H. Conrad



THE AUTHOR'S MIND







# THE AUTHOR'S MIND

AN ANALYSIS, FROM THE AUTHOR'S  
POINT OF VIEW, OF THE FACULTIES  
AND PROCESSES CONCERNED IN  
LITERARY INVENTION

BY

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To  
WARREN E. BOWER





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## PREFACE

It has become a convention and a commonplace to suppose that improvement in writing can follow only as a secondary benefit of some "related" course of study, as mental discipline follows upon the study of Latin, or clear thinking upon mathematics. The student in or out of school who desires to make improvement in the art of expression or who is ambitious to enter literature is practically told that schools and courses of study hold nothing for him. Such literary artists as we have had, have always "happened," apparently in spite of their training; and academic people generally seem to agree that there is nothing they can do about it.

Improvement in writing may be had as a corollary to the study of grammar, of rhetoric, or of literature, but it is not the primary aim of any one of these courses. The best product of the continued study of grammar is the grammarian, whose business is the scientific study of the separate elements of language; the best product of rhetoric is the rhetorician, whose business is the discovery, from writing, of the reasons for the effectiveness of its means; while literature has done its best as a study when it produces a very wizard at the interpretation of abstruse or

obscure passages. Students who aim actually to write are either diverted in one or another of these directions or they are forced to give up and go the whole distance alone. Yet there are thousands and thousands of people who beg each year for a course of study that will lead them directly to effective writing. They do not want to become grammarians or rhetoricians or the scholars of literature. They want to learn to write. Nowhere, I believe, is there a course of study designed entirely for them. Nor has there ever been.

Yet now and again those students are learning the art, and are contributing, in one way and another, to literature. They accomplish this, I believe, by inventing their own courses of study, based, as such courses must be, upon their own stylistic deficiencies as revealed in the course of years by the writing they do.

Anyone who desires earnestly enough to write may invent his own course of study. He may do this alone, or he may do it the more speedily under sympathetic direction. He can be helped chiefly, I believe, by a suggestive analysis of the writing process that will turn his attention ever inward upon the strange and wonderful thing that is taking place in his mind as he writes. He needs to understand that thing: it will not do to gloss

it over with fine talk about genius; it will not do to hide it under a cloak of mystery and superstition. It is a fairly natural process for which science furnishes a workable explanation. Certainly this is the writer's field of action, and the only proper course of study for his training.

Whether we ought to help people who are ambitious to enter literature may be an open question. Certainly it would seem that the world is full of such people who desire help and who snatch at the veriest straw in the hope that it will carry them. "Teach me what to do, and I'll do it," all too many of them cry. But no one can do that. Because no one knows what you *should* do; what you inevitably *will* do, until you've done it. The whole task of the student writer, or of any writer, is to deliver himself of what he has, of what he is. Literary style is the instrument of delivery. And style is entirely a personal matter. The most that an outsider can do is to teach him where to look for the elements, and how to measure the elements, that must make it up. This is the primary aim of the several papers in this book.

Above all, there will be no attempt here to put the student in the way of the clever imitation of literary successes, nor to measure out to him the proper proportions of plot,



atmosphere, rhyme, meter, etc., to win editorial approval. He has learned all too much about these elements already, in the "related" courses of study. He is so burdened with baskets that he cannot gather any fruit. None of this information can do him any good until he finds himself in grave need of one of these elements. At that juncture, he will have to go over that whole ground again and actually invent that element in his own terms. There is no rule for doing this.

But the lack of a rule does not give the student such license as scholars have always supposed it would. A stern necessity is the mother of his every invention. He is bound to please and satisfy himself; the pleasing and satisfying of others is a condition necessary to his own satisfaction. Art is mind working through matter back to mind again. If undiverted and unhurried, the student's impulse will carry him over the full circuit. It is a long, hard road—making art; it is the most complex of all of man's activities. The whole mind, undiverted, unpersuaded, is required in the process. The satisfaction that results from genuine accomplishment is the greatest that life can give.

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I

STYLE



## Style

Literary style can be taught; for certainly it is often enough acquired by learning. Not *any* style can be taught; not *a* style, even—for that is unworthy of art—but *style* itself, the spirit, the inevitable compound of word-sound, word-sight and word-sense that gives the life, and gives it in great abundance. Style is spirit: it cannot be laid hold of by the letter; some part of it must always escape letter-fixation. Yet it is by the letter that spirit is aroused, is called up. And once born, spirit has life in and of itself. It can take its own direction, gather its own food, grow and mature. Style does that. Only first there must be the arousal, and with it there must be imparted an intelligence of the several functions of the mind that are concerned in writing.

If schools and colleges and teachers generally have failed to teach literary style to anyone, if their best efforts have resulted only in “consciously perfect writing,” then it is because they have given only the letter of the thing: they have divorced the word-pattern from the thought-pattern and have touched only upon the former in their classes. The study of word-patterns is dry; it can only be attractive to and can only be pursued with



profit by the mind aroused, instinct with meanings that require patterns for their complete formulation and final realization. Such a mind will invent most of its own patterns. It can, at best, only save itself time by reviewing the methods of others. And this time is saved not through learning what methods to embrace and what to avoid, but through the preoccupation of that mind, during study, with its own processes.

The proper study for literary style, then, is not alone rhetoric, nor yet psychology, but a combination of the two in the only union of them which is accessible to the student writer, namely, the conduct of his own mind during the process of writing. The study should be of conduct, for style is conduct: it is in any individual case that conduct of mind which, over a long period of time, is most certain to be successful in drawing forth from the whole mind such content as the fancy orders, without in the least destroying its more fragile portions or interfering with the harmony of its arrangement. The study should be of the student's own mind, for this is the only mind out of which he can write, and the one whose conduct he is seeking to discover. The study should take place during the process of writing, for it is only then that the faculties he needs to understand are doing, in one way

or another, the thing he desires them to do supremely well.

It is an error to suppose that only "stylish writing" possesses style, and this error, imparted to students over many years, has given unspeakably stupid results in the writing these students have subsequently done. Even the crudest of writing possesses style; that is its style—crudity. Those writers—and there have been many—who define style in terms of particular qualities have missed, I dare to say, the whole point of writing. Writing as art, as literature, exists that the writer may find, and that the reader may find with him, the wonder of life and of nature. It finds the wonder of life in and through the writer's own personality—the only perfectly accessible manifestation of life; it finds the wonder of nature through that same personality's response to and behavior toward the world. Far from being defined in terms of particular qualities, then, style in writing must take its character from the personality that is writing. Any attempt to regulate style in terms of fixed standards must leave out of consideration the fact that style is a means of laying hold upon the elements of living personality. And those elements cannot be known except as style shows them forth. Who, then, but the author himself, can pos-

sibly fashion the instrument of delivery? Imitation of models is not only ethically questionable; it is futile as well, for it defeats the aim of literary art. And imitation is none the less borrowing whether one steal a writer's whole method or whether he analyze that method and steal only the principle of the thing. For in each individual case there must be an individual principle, as well as an ideal method, that springs out of the way in which that particular mind works. No one can know, except the writer himself, how truly his language approximates, both in letter and in spirit, his thought. Critics can say how nearly it approximates *a* thought (and that is as far as criticism is valid), but *the* thought is never born until it is visited with the flesh of literary style.

All that the rules can tell us is that we must make sense and, so far as any outsider is concerned, practically any sense will do. Yet all the great writing of the past has been done in *the* sense of a particular personality. Each of these personalities found, somehow, the proper means for rendering itself. The means in each case was dictated by the nature of the personality that was at work; it was not copied from others. Art is imitation, but only of life. Let art imitate itself, and it becomes artifice.

Nine-tenths of the world's literature is artificial. When we encounter real art, we proclaim a masterpiece or a genius. This does not need to be. The world's hunger for art is testified by the avidity with which it reads anything that is written after the manner of a real literary achievement. A literary creation is a living thing. It sweeps souls into line in its wake. It carries men's minds and hearts out with it, so that they will keep voyaging over that same course for many a year, striving only to retrieve the splendid vision of life which that first voyage gave. Every sailor among men feels somehow akin to Columbus. He would rather share the glory of that master-voyage than make a new one of his own. He is content with marching back and forth over the charted course, even though the greater wonder of life remains yet to be discovered. Whoever would discover more of life's wonder is given the chart, the compass, the log of the first journey. His manner of sailing is even criticized in terms of the master's method. He is made from childhood to memorize such rules as: "Go west; never go south," or it may be: "Go south; never go west," or he may at different times be required to learn both. He is then put upon his own resources. Now for the first time he makes a beginning of learning



through observation of his own conduct—a beginning which ought certainly to have been made when his mind was filled with theory. For now his decisions, at pressing moments in practice, are made in terms of half-remembered theory. He cannot possibly predict the result, and cannot remember, for the moment, whether the theory he is following is one they called true or false. Never before has he thought through this theory in terms of his own practice, for never before has he had any practice of his own. Once embarked upon it, he must follow it and justify it. But the theory arose out of someone else's problem of getting hold of his vastly different personality. If it works in the student's case, it is because the student has chosen to forego the search for wonder in himself, in favor of echoing or reflecting the wonder that was in someone else.

Such educational doctrine, in any field, is hazardous for the student. What he needs is a long period of practice writing during which the enthusiasm of the teacher for genuine literary effects holds him to his task, and in which time he can, with many short exercises, "find himself" in writing. The student ought, rather, to come to creative writing with only himself as equipment. The ordinary personality is wonderful enough for

a masterpiece. If the student have a definite desire to express himself in writing, that is enough to begin with: there must be some adaptability present or that desire could never have asserted itself. Of course his road may be short or it may be long. No one can tell about that. It may be too long, even, to be covered in a lifetime. But he can certainly make definite progress, with study, if his study is actually applied to the task of improving his writing.

This is primary and fundamental. If the greater portion of his energy is absorbed in some other interest, such as the scientific study of grammar or of rhetoric, or in acquiring "culture" from a study of literature, then he may expect only a slight improvement in his writing for a tremendous outlay of energy. To improve his own writing, he must first learn what faculties he has that contribute to the process; he must come to understand what contribution each of these faculties can be expected to make; he must teach his fancy to balance these faculties against each other. Let him work earnestly over these problems for a single day, writing freely and unhampered and studying his own writing, and he will be driven to the exploration of every rhetorical and grammatical device that man has ever invented. What is

better, he will invent a number of his own, necessary to the revelation of what is peculiar to his own personality.

The pitiful spectacle of a treatise that is admirably written, but meaningless, is only possible under a system of teaching which concentrates upon word-pattern and makes a sacrament out of what was intended only as a symbol.

As soon as the student learns what it is he is doing at the moment of writing, he has gained some control of the process. This is more fundamental than knowing what it is he is trying to do. The latter is only fully realized when the work is done, when, in the moment of success, he is able to say, "That's it!" If he knows in detail what it is he is doing—what is going on under his hand, and what forces are causing his strange action—he is then able to check the observed result intelligently against his impulse. Without definitely knowing his aim, he can tell when he has reached it, for he is impelled to creation by a combination of instincts, and he experiences a feeling of satisfaction when his result is achieved. His fancy directs the work; this is art's most pleasing aspect, and the reason of its superiority over life. He may do what he pleases to do. Fancy-free he goes, swinging lightly from a method that promises poor re-

sults to one that promises better. As a student, he will need to have his own feeling of satisfaction reinforced by someone else. At the first, there will have to be some concurrence of opinion about what is satisfactory. Later, this will not be needed at all.

After a small measure of real success, the student may be left to himself. He has caught a flash from the white wing of truth; he has seen a glimpse of wonder in his own being. He has got what every student needs: not a hundred answers, but one definite problem. He will be tantalized thenceforth with the imperfection of his style and will have no sound sleep until he has made of it an instrument for the adequate delivery of himself into the world. When he has reached this point of independence and stability, i. e., when the spirit of literary style is awake within him, he may read any and every thing that has ever been written on the subject, and it will all be helpful to him. Every critical essay on the means employed in literary style; every creative work in which style is effective; indeed, everything that comes to his hand will help him to correct and improve what he already has. There is no imitation here, no borrowing: this is the process of invention.

I have got this far without mentioning the



two terms, form and substance. Intruding here at this time, they look a little absurd. Form, I take it, is that shape in which a thing is expressed; and substance is the stuff that is put into that shape. No one can dictate anything about these two requisites, for these are the two main things art is *looking for*. One takes along dogs, not rabbits, when on a rabbit-hunt. When your art is complete, it will have form and it will have substance. Its completeness will consist in that. But what that form will be and what that substance will be is precisely the object of your quest. Many a writer has trudged servilely into mediocrity upon iambic feet. Many another has shut himself away from heaven with an ill-fitting cloak, even a cloak once worn by a master. Because a form has once served to reveal a great personality is no guarantee that it will serve another. The form a writer chooses to write in must be a matter of his own taste, and for this there is no accounting. Whatever form is part and parcel of his own inner substance is the correct one. Analysis into form and substance of finished pieces of writing is futile: the writer's problem is only confused by it; the reader does not need such analysis if the writing is really effective.

There is yet a final word to say. Failing to get at the essence of literary style in com-

position (indeed, without ever attempting it!) teachers have fallen upon the practice of teaching literary trickery. Students go restlessly through courses that teach them only how to appear engaging on paper, or how to simulate some other quality of being that has sometime been effective in literary work. A kind of mass-instruction results whenever the teacher, rather than the student, does the work of the course. These are indeed lean years. The whole struggle for the interpretation of life seems to be given up all along the line. In that struggle, literature is a point of view as much as is philosophy or religion. It has its own peculiar means of throwing light on the problem. That means is literary style. That style has always been, in the masterpieces of the past, the means best suited to the personality of the composer. Artists, not critics, have made style whenever it has been made. And no one knows or ever can know what miracles there are in the personality of the veriest schoolboy who is being denied the privilege of working out his own peculiar contribution in his own best way.



## II

# THE SOURCE OF AN AUTHOR'S POWER





## *The Source of an Author's Power*

When a writer writes, where does the writing come from?

There are almost as many answers to this question as there are people who hold an opinion upon it. Some think that writing comes from the author's dead ancestors; some, from some charm he carries in his pocket or has before him on his desk; some hold that it is all mysteriously whispered into his ear while he sleeps, to be poured out upon paper when he wakes. Most everyone believes, at least partially, that there is a great literary god who roams about at midnight, to seize the wrists of worthy writers when he thinks they have agonized long enough, and force them to write things of which they, unaided, would be incapable. I think there is more superstition connected with this subject than with any other thing in modern times. There is reason enough that this should be so.

Whether one is a "sweet young thing" or a tired business man, one is certain to ask, when he meets a writer: "But how do you *do* it?" And the writer, bored with the eternal recurrence of this same question, smiles good-humoredly. Perhaps he does not know. Perhaps he recognizes that even his partial explanation would dash to earth a number of

semi-sacred illusions. More likely he knows that the answer is too complex for his questioner to follow without any background of literary discipline. He sits blinking, smiling, perhaps blushing a little. He is relieved and satisfied if, while awaiting an answer, the questioner formulates one that is based on magic, superstition or god-given fire. And so these three types of theories run rampant through the world, and no one is ever incautious enough to essay the thankless task of assailing them.

Working in all of the arts there are two kinds of people, composers and interpreters. The classes are most distinct in music, where the composer may not be a performer, may not be able, even, to play his own compositions. The composer's art is composition; it has its own technique, and is complete without the use of musical instruments. The interpreter, for his part, does not need to be a composer, and most often is not. His art has its own elaborate technique, distinct from the technique of composition. He renders the composition into sound: the form in which we are accustomed to think of music. If there are more interpreters than there are composers, it does not follow that composition is necessarily the higher art. We cannot say that

either of them is higher than the other: art must have both of them in order to exist.

In literature alone, I think, it is necessary for the artist to be interpreter and composer rolled into one. The reason for this is that the medium of literature—the written word—is a totally artificial, totally arbitrary thing which has no relation, that the senses can perceive, to anything in life or in nature. A literary composition, being made up of arbitrary symbols in its entirety, does not exist until it has been rendered into those symbols in its final form. Only the composer can do this, and in doing it he interprets his composition.

The two processes, though they must be identified with the same person, are not coincident. There are still two arts, composition and interpretation. Each has its own technique. It is possible to analyze them separately. Indeed, all our confusion and superstition with regard to writing has arisen because our theories have dealt with it as one art, when in reality it is two.

When a writer writes, where does the writing come from?

I shall have to ask you now: What do you mean? Do you want me to explain where the thing comes from that is inside of him at the moment of writing? Or do you want to

know where he gets his ability to render it into words? I shall attempt to answer these questions one at a time, and for the sake of the climactic order, I shall reverse them and deal first with the interpretative phase of the art.

Given a literary impulse (whether it comes from the writer's dead ancestors, from the god of letters, or from a thunderbolt), what is a writer to do with it. He should treat it exactly as the conductor of an orchestra would treat the score that he is going to interpret. Here is the material of the composition: it remains but to be rendered, and the problem in rendering is largely the problem of approximating, in a medium, the ideal tone of the work.

Like the conductor, he must be able correctly to read the score. He must see what he has, there in his mind. In this connection, a world of patience is what he needs. He must take the long, long look that is necessary in order to become thoroughly familiar with all of the values of the composition he is going to render. Some of this looking is done in preliminary study: a great deal of it is done as the writer proceeds from point to point in his work. He must be a sure looker, but he must also be a swift looker. Through long practice, he gradually develops an ability to



look both surely and swiftly and to grasp in an instant, accurately, the thought or the feeling that is there to be transposed.

Once he has read the score—once he knows intimately the composition that is to be rendered—the real task of interpretation begins. How shall he render it? He must, first of all, have full control of his medium, for words are tricky things and they bear (we must keep in mind) no physical relation to the things they stand for. Without meaning to be misled, the writer is often carried away on the flood of his words until he finds that he has written down something which has but slight relation to the composition upon which he is working. By frequent contact, words get relations formed among themselves. They draw each other, and this they have no right to do, being only symbols. The unwary writer sooner or later puts down things which, for the composition he is rendering, are decidedly “out of the picture.” It is only by referring back frequently and in all honesty to the composition that is being rendered, that this lapse can be avoided. The writer must live intimately with his soul if he is to rise at all times above the magnetic drawing-power of his medium.

But it is not alone unconsciously and through the trickery of words that a compo-

sition gets itself distorted in the rendering. More often it is the writer's own villainy that spoils the piece. Through some perversity of his nature, or to get himself credit for something which his soul knows is indefensible, he undeliberately mis-interprets. I say undeliberately, because at the time he does not know why he is doing it. The question, Why? is a complex one; it is apart from the immediate subject of interpretation upon which his whole thought is centered; he does not care, just then, to go into it in search of an answer. He commits the dishonesty, and then hides it from himself by dwelling upon the beauty (or upon some other quality) of the passage in which it occurs. Thus, passages and verses of the greatest artificial beauty often cover the author's sorest spot in his work. He knows that here he has not been "square," and he summons all the technique of his art to hide his guilt, as a blush covers a feeling of shame.

So the interpreter must be able carefully and accurately to read the score of the composition; he must be in sympathy with it and determined to render the whole truth of it and nothing but the truth of it. In addition to this, he adds something in his own right as interpreter, and in doing so, the whole technique of the interpreter's art comes into play.

In the soul of many a writer the unending conflict of humanity goes rolling and echoing, though he can but dimly approximate that conflict on paper. He may be a great composer, but in literature the artist must be composer and interpreter rolled into one. If he has not fully mastered the art of interpretation, no one can ever know what great vision he sees.

As to acquiring that ability, or even growing to a mastery of it, that is all a comparatively simple matter. Fortunately, the accurate, forceful, flexible use of the language is practically a requirement of present-day life. We make no question but that it can be taught. If we wish to acquire such a mastery of it as will enable us to sell bonds to someone who otherwise would not buy them, we go to the schools, and soon we have developed that power. While the rendering of a literary composition is a matter more complex than selling bonds, there can be no question at all but that even this can be learned. You simply spend more time in study. And where the bond salesman needs only to read and to write by way of preparation for his work (imitation being the simplest and most common form of learning), the literary student needs to delve into the theory of rhetoric, the history of languages, the development of his

literary form. A mastery of language for literary purposes takes a longer time and must be broader and deeper than that required for selling bonds, but it is no different in kind. It can be taught and learned as well as the other: it is only vastly more intensive.

But still, when a writer writes, where *does* the writing come from? Out of the atmosphere? Out of the earth? Out of a thunderbolt?

In answering no to all of these guesses, I am not destroying, I think, any of the wonder of life or any of the high regard in which authors are held. When a writer writes, the writing comes out of his personality, and that is just as wonderful as though it came out of the earth, the air, or the sky. But unlike these supposed sources, it can be understood, with sufficient study. The writer who has been asked: "How do you *do* it?" may well blush, may well feel self-conscious, for he is himself the source of all that he has perpetrated.

I say that the writer's personality—the true source of his inspiration—can be understood. I do not mean that the writer or anybody else completely understands it. I mean that it falls within the field of discoverable knowledge; that human beings have no taboo against probing it; that we are at the present

moment making great strides toward a working knowledge of it. I suppose the greatest triumph of anthropology as a science would be the complete analysis of the creative impulse. But no matter: we know enough about personality now to do things with it and to make it do things for us. We make it sell bonds, for example.

If we can, as I say, make it do things for us, we can make it compose literature. Now I have become daring, but I mean exactly what I say. A dog that will fetch a bone will carry a bone, and a waterfall that will turn a mill-wheel will run a power-house. What we shall have to do in order to make our personalities compose literature for us, constitutes the technique of literary composition. This technique, like the other, can be learned. Having no commercial value, it is not dealt with in schools at all. But since each of us is a personality in himself, the laws of operation for personality are discoverable individually. We shall simply have to discover them.

Of course the process is not going to be a simple one. The whole mind is probably the sum-total of personality. Science has already shown that in dealing with mind we have to deal not only with conscious function, but also with the whole range of unconscious function, unplumbed and unexplored. It is in this



range of the unconscious that the mystery and wonder of life reside: here in this unfathomed depth the creative impulse goes, in its season, to spawn.

Fearful and wonderful is the mind of man. Long ago it accomplished the Seven Wonders, and now adds seventy more. Everyone who has ever dared to suggest a thing that man could not do has lived to see it done. In the face of man's long array of reassuring accomplishment, and with some miracle breaking forth in every life, the wonder is that we hold back from rushing to the zenith with our demands upon the mind. It is hardly too much to say that man's mind has done everything that man has ever asked it to do. If you ask your mind to do some little thing for you—say, to compose literature—don't you suppose that it would do it? The chances, I think, are favorable, but there are several things to consider in making the demand.

First: you make literature out of the material that has rolled through your mind. You should notify your mind early enough in life so that it can lay aside such handy pieces of material as it will want to use in fulfilling the demand you make upon it. If, at the age of eight, you notified your mind that you desired it to prepare for a career as a horse-doc-

tor, and if you are now eighty, then it is too late to change. Your mind, waking and sleeping, has spent seventy-two tireless years stocking itself with all manner of material and information that would be helpful to a horse-doctor. It has, in its very formation and growth, curled itself around the veterinary principle. Had you the force of will to bend it, your mind would take the new direction even now, but you would be able to compose literature only insofar as the material gathered for another purpose should prove to be valuable to literature. So the determination of mind must be made early enough to allow for the gathering and organizing of material.

Second: we are not all of us placed in the same circumstances. It is necessary for many, because of the positions in which they are placed, to entertain interests which are distasteful to them. It is necessary for all of us to have some interests aside from the one that dominates the individual life. Man's life may be said to flow as separate streams of interest. The mind, occupied with all the interests of life, must divide itself anew with each new direction of interest. Readily enough, then, there is a tendency for all of us to become scatter-minded. And we cannot afford to. If you ask your mind to compose

literature for you, you ought not to ask that it do other things of parallel import. You ought to leave it unhampered to organize its program in its own way. If you are so placed that you cannot leave it unhampered at its task, you will secure your own greater happiness by not asking it for literature at all. Better ask in all solemnity for but one thing of major importance, ask your *whole* mind for that, and then leave your whole mind free to work upon it.

Third: once you have determined your mind in favor of literature, you ought to leave it alone. It is tireless in its work. Its unplumbed and unexplored unconscious depths will sift out the whole universe for you and retain material that your conscious mind did not even notice in passing. (It is when it does this that we speak of "inspiration!") Better use your conscious mind for the regulation of your every-day affairs. Any conscious seeking after material "that would make a good story," throws one into an attitude of insincerity with life, and predisposes his conclusions to falsity. More than that, one needs one's conscious faculties for the transaction of material affairs: there is money to earn, the plumber to pay, a trunk to check, and what not. So long as the unconscious is ready and willing to gather material

for art and to organize it, we should allow it to do so, especially as it operates at no cost of time or attention. The art is always truer if it has no conscious theories imposed upon it.

I am prepared to say, then, that the greatest single factor in an ability to compose is an early, strong and undivided determination to do so. While a person may not be thinking specifically of writing, if his early, whole-hearted bent is to digest the whole world and to make something out of it, then there are automatically set in his mind ten thousand little traps that will catch and hold every tiny morsel that promises in any way to fulfill his life's most central resolution.

But it is not easy to determine the bent of the unconscious mind. Often we tell ourselves over and over: "I mean to do such and so," only to discover later that we never really meant to do anything of the sort. I think that a person needs to be entirely honest, entirely unaffected, entirely inquisitive, if he is to tell whether his *whole mind* is really *made up*. If the whole mind is not determined upon a course, then the pursuit of the course may be inhibited by a contrary determination.

We used to think, and some of us still think, that writers are born and not made. Heredity has always received too much credit for literary work. It is true that we do not

know enough about the unconscious to be sure of its hereditary pattern; and in the case of genius there is some reason to wonder. But, after all, if you take determination to be the most important factor, the formation even of genius becomes clear. The genius is one who is admirably adapted, entirely determined, and free from inhibiting complexes. With only one of these factors—adaptation—can heredity have anything to do. And that one factor is the only one of the three that we do not need to worry about, for the reason that *we never get down to it*. Let me make this clear.

Given two people, both of whom are entirely determined to write (the degree of determination Christ required when he said: "Sell all thou hast and give it to the poor and come, follow me.") and who have freed themselves from every inhibiting force. Of these two, that one will become the greater composer whose inherited disposition is farther over in the direction of art. But I am sure that two such people have never been on earth together. Nor has any man ever written the last word that his inherited limitations would let him write. On the contrary, if you look at the history of literature, the best writing has always been done when there was a soul fully determined that he would do it.



Yet the veriest tyro at the present moment sits wondering if heredity is disposed in his case to let him write. Compared with determination, heredity has done so little for letters that I feel I should say to the hesitant one: "Bother heredity! Go to and write!"

But there is a grave danger there. The tyro may be seeking an excuse. If he is, then it would be wrong to urge him, to give him license. He probably wants to do something else. If he does, then he would never be willing to undergo the denial and sacrifice that literature would demand of him, and so could not be successful at it. The world is full of people who try to steal the honor and glory of letters while keeping one foot upon the base of real estate or insurance. Like Peter, they have not faith enough to step boldly out upon the water. What they lack is not faith in themselves alone; it is faith in the power of the mind; it is a lack of faith in human personality. Since literature deals with life, they of little faith can make only little books: their lack of faith is reflected in their works. There is always a little tremor of doubt in their wonder at life, and with the tremor, the whole magnificent performance falters and sinks.

In the large, the situation takes care of itself. There are so many more lucrative

things that a young person can determine to do, that a very few ever organize their lives around writing. Their reason for so determining is largely unconscious, and probably a natural adaptability is present to set them off. Among those who try literature only half-heartedly, keeping the best half of their minds for something "more important," are the minor tragedies with which the path of letters is strewn. Some of these want desperately to live the life that a writer is traditionally supposed to live; some others are willing to undergo agonies if only they can get something—*anything*—into print for vanity's sake; none of them, I believe, want to create literature with that whole-hearted determination that cannot die. Those who *want* to create, *do* create on some scale or other. Among them there is an aristocracy of those who have given their minds to the work with complete absorption, and who have, through study, gained a complete mastery over their medium.

When a writer writes, the writing comes from his personality, from his whole mind. Anything he writes may be taken as a good measure of how he looks at things, of what he is. As art, his writing has two aspects: it is composition and it is interpretation. The composition may be wonderful while the in-

terpretation is poor, or vice versa. If the composition is poor, only long years of living can improve it; if the interpretation is poor, it means simply that he has not studied his lessons. Either in school or out of school he can acquire such a mastery of language as will enable him to render adequately any effect that he can conceive. One phase of his art without the other is simply useless. It is only when great composition is wedded to excellent interpretation that enduring literature results.



### III

## THE DIRECTION OF ENERGY





## *The Direction of Energy*

Not alone are the sources of creative energy misunderstood by the ambitious writer: the very bulk of that precious energy which springs forth spontaneously is often misapplied. There is usually a way of coaxing one's impulse into activity: either blindly—by employing some charm or some superstitious rite—or consciously—by willing into action the faculties which make it up. But where is the supernatural hand that will point the way for the best employment of that impulse, once it has been summoned? Must one always take the direction pointed by great writers of the past? Must one follow the "signs of the times," adhering to the customs and fashions among his contemporaries? Must one, with his ear to the ground, tune his heart-beat to the tread of his marching audience? There are to be found some writers whose doctrine is in each of these courses. Among them, the unstable beginner hesitates and stumbles. To whom shall he fly? Who is it holds the words of eternal life?

I think we ought to look at literary energy in the same way as we look at any other kind of energy. Here, coal is mined; there, poems are written; everywhere the same burning force that is behind life is at work. The

manifest differences in the results achieved by it are due only to the direction given by the human will. Dam a waterfall, and great power is yours; you are free to use it for crushing stone or for weaving cloth. You have only to govern the conditions under which it is transmitted and to build the machinery for its conversion. Between crushing stone and weaving cloth is yours to decide. I do not propose to go into the ethics of that decision, but I am tremendously interested, and any writer is tremendously interested, in the faculty which can turn great power to such divergent purposes. We are interested because it is the same faculty which is at work when we choose a subject for literary endeavor; when we reject one manner of writing in favor of another; when we strike out a word and interline its substitute; when, in a word, we labor to make art. Without an analysis of this important faculty, without some understanding of the laws of its operation, the writer can never, it seems to me, control his work, and so he can achieve only such result as the spontaneity of his impulse will permit. This result would only be, at its worst, questionable art; at its best, accidental art.

The matter rests finally upon his own judgment, and so it comes about that a very perplexing problem depends for its solution

upon a highly complicated process. Any failure of a nice adjustment in the contributing factors to the process called judgment will throw the whole solution askew and incline it in a direction divergent from truth, which all artistic effort is bound to uncover. A clear understanding of judgment is therefore essential at the outset.

In matters of judgment it is the essential flavor of the author's own life that inclines him one way rather than another. For always an author is digging away at life, trying to interpret it, to "make something out of it." When he has found a manifestation sufficiently startling to compel his attention, he finds himself immediately inclined to say either "this is so" or "that is not so." And this before the process of logic or of conscious judgment can get under way: the author is of *this* or of *that* persuasion with regard to all phenomena. The highly intellectual, recognizing that all phenomena are two-headed, would insist that our judgments are of different sorts because we approach objects now with the intellect, now with the emotions. And because "the emotions" is a mysterious field, they get themselves believed. Rather, I think, we approach phenomena now with the conscious intellect, now with the unconscious intellect, and work upon them the same

process in both cases. The more potent of these two types of decision is the one that arises in the deeper recesses of the mind; the one that is formed naturally rather than systematically, and upon the basis of unnoticed experience.

We are more readily inclined, I say, toward "emotional" judgments. I have not yet said that these judgments are better than the intellectual ones. There is much to be said between them. When the facts of any case that is to be tried are referred to known experience, i. e., to the conscious mind, the decision rendered is an orderly one, and the judgment is both consistent and defensible. That is to say, the process can be recalled and repeated in all similar cases, and all the successive steps can be laid out (on paper if necessary) in its support. When the judgment rendered is an "emotional" one, the case is tried, I maintain, by a court similarly constituted, but which meets in secret session. The case is referred to that great bulk of impression and experience that touches and alters the mind without being formally checked and recorded at any one of the five ports of entry. And because judge and jury here meet behind a screen, they are inaccessible alike to persuasion and to bribery. Because of this fact, the judgments in emotional cases are rather like-

ly to be in keeping with the best interests of the individual. If a man had only himself to look out for, he would do best by following out all of his emotional judgments.

But, as the unnoticed mental content is inaccessible for conscious examination, so must it also be chaotic in the sense of lacking that order which we have discovered in—or have imposed upon—the rest of the world. To abandon ourselves to emotion would be to abandon the social scheme and start afresh somewhere previous to its imposition, with no definite assurance that we should come out better on our next trip to the top. This we are all unwilling to do, being engrossed in the accomplishment of smaller but more pressing purposes.

Better far, at this late day, that we should go on with the joy of discovering more and more of the ore that is there in the dark caverns of the mind and, bringing pieces of it to light, take our pleasure in putting the pieces out from us in patterns according to the scheme of intellect, which is logic; or of imagination, which is art. Better far that we bring the content of the unknown regions of the mind into the open (render them conscious) to be studied or to be arranged, treating it precisely as we treat the content of the



known regions. In this practice has always been man's greatest joy.

Fortunately, this is exactly the process of rendering a complete judgment. Discrimination is made between two courses of action, first, upon the basis of the unconscious faculties—what might be called the author's "natural feeling" about the matter; and second, upon the basis of the conscious faculties—the author's orderly reasoning concerning it. It is not until both of these factors have participated in a decision that the judgment rendered has behind it the full force of the author's *whole mind*. This is important. But it is by no means necessary that the two processes shall ever come to complete agreement. So fortunate a circumstance would only result in giving double strength to the decision, and this kind of judgment is no doubt responsible for the fortunately rare cases of complete fanaticism. The stimulant is evidently too strong for local use and ought to be diluted. For ordinary purposes, I should say, a mixture of fifty per cent emotion and fifty per cent logic is sufficient to work miracles. Then, in varying the formula, feeling should be permitted to have the larger sway in all judgments within the purely inventive phase of writing, while logic should have the larger sway in the matter of formal composition.

The process of forming a complete judgment is, practically, somewhat as follows:

A choice is open, not between two courses of action (for this is creative work), but between all possible courses of action. The writer finds himself unconsciously inclined toward one of them. Here he should make no mistake: his inclination is not toward one of them to the exclusion of all others, but simply to one of them *more* than the others. The difference of impulsion may be only very slight; and this is important to remember. He chooses that one, tentatively. Now let him reason. Should his reason tell him that this choice is the worst of all possible choices, he ought to reject it. He never can get the whole gigantic force of his mind behind that choice, to work it out for him into something of which he can be proud, if only a half of his mind is willing to accept the task. The first choice, then, is rejected. Now let him take the next best course toward which feeling impels him. Should that be equally impossible, let him try the next. Somewhere, perhaps upon choice number five, reason will agree. The moment this happens, the judgment is formed, and all the marvelous power of his mind is thrown at once to the accomplishment of whatever purpose he wishes to achieve.

The explanation which I have given will seem so intensely individual a matter that I anticipate objections to be made upon that ground. Has, then, no one but the author himself anything to say on so important a question as what he shall write about; how he shall write about it? Shall all outside criteria be discounted? What place does the wisdom of past ages have in this scheme? What of the forms and fashions of his age; the demands of his audience?

These, I affirm, should give the author no trouble whatever. He will do well never to give thought to any one of these factors for its own sake. Each one of them is only a factor, anyway, and should not dictate the whole decision. The moment he considers a single factor separately from the others, he gives it undue prominence. Whatever knowledge he has of these matters is present in his mind at the moment of forming any judgment. Each factor thus is represented in the decision precisely to the extent that it has been able to influence his whole mind and to draw his whole mind in its own direction. No more influence than this is due to any factor, nor can any more, in all honesty, be given. There may be elements of the universe which are not represented at all in a given author's mind at the moment of a given decision, and

these elements, because they are not present, fail of influencing the direction of his energy. It may be objected that any decision made at such a moment cannot lead to a universal. Granted. But the decision made will be as universal as that author is capable of making it, and if the element is not present as a factor, then that author has no business to deal with it anyway. There is no universe for him save the one he has encountered. That universe is fully represented in his mind and will be reflected in his work. Any departure from it, even as a background for the smallest bit of writing, will tend to lead the reader in the direction of falsity and to stamp the writer as one who breaks faith with his audience.

If all of the manifold judgments, choices and decisions which are necessary to the building up of any literary work are made carefully and with the whole mind of the author, then that work will come as near to having a universal quality as that author can make it. Further, the question of proportion as among the various elements in life and nature will take care of itself. There can be no quarrel as to the prominence given to this passion, to that emotion; as to the tone of the whole; as to its tragic or comic conclusion. The author has done simply what he *could* do, what life and nature have given him to do. Farther

than that he cannot go. He has put himself into words: upon the result of this action he must stand or fall. This, in all honesty, he will be willing to do. He has made the work with his whole mind, with all that is in him. He will not be ashamed of it. With all care and in full conscience he has directed that all of his energy be poured forth upon a given task, and he has seen that task through to its completion. The complete work may be weak and faltering, or it may be a great masterpiece. The author is sure only of this: by no other method of work could he have done it any better.

IV

THE  
CONTROLLING FACTOR





## *The Controlling Factor*

A writer will find enduring satisfaction in literary work only to the degree in which that work expresses and enables him to interpret his own personality: his writing is simply that personality objectified. Moreover, all of the judgments leading toward the creation of a given literary work and away from all other possible literary works, are manifestations of this same personality at work. Ideally, then, if we have given a personality, the precise literary work which should come from it is inevitable. But practically, that precise literary work never fully evolves. Two classes of difficulties interfere. These are, first, those inherent in the task itself—the complexity of the personality, the subtlety of its values, and the rigidity of the medium; second, those extraneous to the task in hand—chance, hazard and superstition. The inherent difficulties must be dealt with separately as they arise, and I have treated, in another place, some of the problems they present. The extraneous difficulties may all be eliminated at one stroke by the writer who is wise. If we reject the inspiration theory of writing, we eliminate this whole class of perplexities. But we must go the whole way and eradicate every trace of writing habit that was formed

on the basis of the inspiration theory: too much emphasis cannot be put upon the necessity for control.

No writer would think of putting his pen to paper and saying to the pen: Go to! No writer would think of counting, as contributions to his total literary effect, the haphazard pen-scratchings made in the margin of his manuscript during a moment of vexation. Yet many a writer is willing to hold sacred the veriest foolery he may have happened to write while the chaotic elements in his mind were in control. If there is need for a guiding sense in controlling the direction and shape of each pen-stroke, there is even greater need for its exercise in marshalling thought, for all movements entering into a literary work must be kept significant.

But if a literary work is only the objectification of the writer's personality through its fusion with the symbols representing external things, and if that work (given the personality) is ideally inevitable, what power can there be that will preside over the process of fusion and direct its course? What power, what faculty can there be within the mind of man that will control the process of his whole mind's function? Why, precisely that faculty which permits a man to judge in advance the effects of any of his other acts: the facul-

ty called imagination. It is the one faculty which can get out from and above the whole mental process and direct, with a certain discernment, the drawing forth of such material as will contribute to certain ends. Simply stated, imagination is the faculty which enables a writer to be, at the moment of writing, the very audience for whom the writing is done; to take joy in its success, to frown over its failure. Therein lies his strongest impulsion to literary work, and the source of his most enduring satisfaction.

The joy which anyone takes in any work of art lies in the fact that that work presents, in an objective medium, elements universally present in human personality, though unrealized by the individual mind. When objectified by an artist, they become available for realization by all and sundry. The appreciator of a work of art is moved simply to a better acquaintance with himself, with his own personality. Some part of his personality, hitherto unrealized, marvelous in its nature, is laid before his conscious mind, and he unites himself with it. The artist is simply priest in this personal religion which moves all men. But he is at the same moment the driven seeker after self-realization, and he objectifies his personality as much for his own benefit as for that of his flock. The joy of

creative work is, then, simply what we have always called an aesthetic experience. If the creator's joy in his own work is greater than that to be had by all and sundry, it will be only because he can completely identify himself with it, whereas any other appreciator can identify himself only with such elements of it as are universal. To be universally appreciated, a work would need to be done by a personality in sympathy with all humanity. It is the depth of sympathy of a work which makes possible a depth of appreciation. And imagination—the ability to put one's self in another's place—is the basis of all sympathy for human kind.

This is the divine gift that makes a writer really a god in his own universe. But simply recognizing that he has it and that it is a powerful element will avail nothing. We must make some analysis of it and find to what uses it may be put.

The layman is always willing to concede that an author has imagination. But the layman thinks of it entirely in terms of the process of "making up" a story. An imaginative person is one who can see a bear where no bear is; who can make up and describe a being the like of which no one has ever seen; who can, in general, do some extravagant thing in the course of his writing. Actually,

these are all things which relatively unimaginative persons may do supremely well, and the fact of doing these things may even be evidence of a lack of imagination. What is a more definite mark of imagination in an author is the ability to read over his own shoulder as he writes, checking the impulse to highly fabricated invention, to the depiction of impossible beings, and to the tendency toward extravagance in writing. The imaginative writer is simply the controlled writer, every stroke of whose pen goes down hard and clean upon the page. His image is in the rock of his medium; he must cut away the shapelessness around it until the whole thing stands revealed. He must cut far enough clearly and sharply to reveal form; he must not cut too far, lest his image lapse back again into shapelessness. Imagination gives him, first, an image of what he is cutting for—his sense, as reader, of what will satisfy him in the way of an aesthetic experience; and second, an image of what cuts he must make in order to secure his result—his sense, as writer, for the proper selection and grouping of elements. The bungling writer is the unimaginative writer; he does not know what effect will be adequate; he does not know how best to secure such effect as he plans.

But aside from the simple power of put-



ting the writer's work at a sufficient distance from him to be planned and judged, imagination presides over many of the separate processes which enter into the whole work of building a literary structure. To see a bear where no bear is may be possible to any man. Our instinctive fears testify to that. But to take the image of a bear which memory presents, and to put that image out from one as a living beast whose actions may be criticised and corrected, and then to employ the corrected actions in a drama touching upon elements of human experience and personality—this is quite a different matter. Add to its difficulty the fact that a dozen other elements of the drama are occurring at the moment, each presenting its own imaginative problem, and the division of imaginative power into separate functions becomes apparent.

First and simplest among these functions is the government of imagery. A thoroughgoing creative impulse will surrender to the imagination the keys to all the doors of the mind. Down the long halls, in odd moments, the imagination may wander, taking stock of the treasure that is stored in each room. When no one is about, and the castle is quiet, the imagination may even peer down into the dungeon where have been cast, through the centuries, all manner of things; things un-

sightly and offensive; things too frail or too worn for use; things left behind by beggars and pilgrims and other visitors; things uncatalogued and unassayed which seemed, at the moment of acquisition, to be of no value. Over all the rich store of the castle, the imagination holds sway: all doors open to it; it alone can draw forth the unclassified material from the dungeon. Give the mind a bit of weaving to do, and the imagination will find for it both thread and loom. Give the mind a bit of repairing to do, and the imagination will select from its store materials of the proper strength and size and color. All that is required is plenty of time for the search. Nor does the writer need to be satisfied with a makeshift in the case of any demand he has made upon the imagination. He should be a hard taskmaster. He should launch forth confidently, expecting his imagination to perform a miracle for him at each trip; he should reject with a snarl every substitute his servant offers, sending her back time and again until she produces not alone what he would be satisfied with, but a very miracle of discovery.

"What! There are no silver spoons in the Blue Room? Then go to the Green Room. I must have a silver spoon! . . .

"None there? Then go to the red room!  
 "Back again, and no silver spoon? Wretch, get down into the dungeon, and don't come

out until you have found me a silver spoon!

...

"Ah! A gold one. That is better still. Now find me a crown set with rubies and diamonds."

But the hard-driven servant who, possessing the keys, is forced to search her master's stores, may become, on quiet evenings, quite a solace to a lonely writer in a large house. It is with her that he talks, and quiet and deep is their communion. The deftness of her touch gets itself represented in his work, and the softness of her voice, and even the depth of her searching, kindly eyes. All the color of the softer tones in his work are due to her presence; he will concede that much.

The second function of the imagination in the formation of any literary thing lies in the supervision of plans; the management of the preliminary arrangements. The author is only a vital being, impelled to investigate himself. That that self is a thing to wonder at, no one has ever denied. How to get at it? How to lay its wonder bare? Suddenly a plan occurs, a pattern comes to hand into which the elements of this wonder may be woven and preserved. Who put that plan into the author's head? Why, the author made it up. He is a wise man: he has studied much, stocking his mind with all that is known about patterns. He just—well, thought of it all

himself. Wonderful man! Of course he will admit that it was something the servant said that night when the wind blew loudly that put him on the track of it. She would be the one to think of such a thing, having nothing to do all day but range through the well-stored house, upstairs and down. And that night she *did* drop a remark, and even illustrated it with her pencil, so that the author saw the whole thing in a flash. That gave him a start upon a new and wonderful course. Yes, the author will even admit that much.

Third, and most important, the imagination is the only natural critic. It is she who reads the manuscript, sometimes while he writes, sometimes while he is away for the day attending to his other affairs. In the former case, she may cough discreetly behind his chair when he is letting things go wrong. He does not hear that cough; oh! he does not hear it at all, so busy is he. But presently he begins to frown, and in a moment he throws a whole page into the waste-basket. How well they understand each other, this master and the keeper of his house! In the latter case, the careless servant is sure to leave a page of manuscript lying so that it will catch the author's attention when he returns. Ha! He was just thinking about that very page.

Something wrong there, maybe. H'mmmm.

When they meet in the hall or on the stairs, she is nervous, watchful, humble. He greets her with a frown, and is sure to send her flying to the attic or to the basement in search of some impossible thing which, later, he may not even use. Oh, he is a terrible master, harsh and severe. He lets it be known every moment that he is in control. Even in their quiet talks together, he is constantly letting her know what new and important thoughts he has been having. She is quiet and reserved during these moments, and he watches her face anxiously. Now and again, in her humble way, she wonders about one of his thoughts. He watches her face very closely while she is wondering. Presently, by some strange coincidence, he may begin wondering, too, and about that same thought. Any careful, earnest author is willing to admit that much.

As a matter of fact, if an author is going to compose literature with his whole mind, literature that is going to be an expression of his full personality, he can do nothing but surrender himself completely to his imagination, as that is the only faculty he has which can range over the full height and depth of his mind. Room after room in the storehouse of his mind is locked to him else. The au-

thor, while writing, simply *is* an imagination at work, no less. If he is more, then that more is due solely to the power of his impulse. His initial creative impulse is in control only to the extent that it is willing to push the matter of composition. A powerful impulse (arising out of the complete centering of a mind upon its object) will push the matter to the extreme; will require much for its satisfaction. There will have to be many trips to cellar and to garret; there will have to be a perpetual welcome to this valuable servant who is willing to read manuscript, to cough discreetly, to displace faulty pages; there will have to be long, quiet hours of communion and a slavish deference to the servant's every whim. Whatever of artistic irritability an author may have, he had better overthrow his reason than to interfere through carelessness or through impatience with the operation of his imaginative faculty.

Once he has decided to carve his image in the rock, he has given his imagination full control. He does not know what that image is (Indeed, that is what he is trying to find out!), and so does not know how best to proceed. If he is patient and watchful and diligent with his tools, a miracle will work itself out under his hand. And he may honestly claim to have done it all himself!





V

JOURNALISM  
AND LITERATURE



## *Journalism and Literature*

Save among literary persons themselves, small distinction is made between journalism and literature. To most persons, if a man is able to write well, he is to be admired. One ought not to be surprised at seeing a novelist write a great editorial, or at seeing the headline artist of the local paper turn out the great American novel. Indeed, the novelist may secretly believe that he can do the journalist's work with one hand tied behind his back, and every reporter dreams of becoming a novelist. This is a confusion which no ambitious writer can afford to have in his mind. It arises in the belief that a facility in the use of words is the central characteristic of literary art.

And this belief is false. There are, I should say, a thousand kinds of word-facility, as glibness, patness, garrulity, cleverness, etc., no one of which is to be sought for its own sake. More than half of the kinds of facility that are possible with words will never lead either to journalism or to literature. A fine discrimination is needed by the person who is going to write, to enable him to see what it is he needs, so that he may supervise his own progress. He must know, at the outset, that words have many uses aside from

the one to which they are put by the literary artist.

They are used, for example, as the current coin of communication between persons. Although this use of words is common, it is by no means simple. The two people know each other, or they have decided that they may as well know each other. As a consequence, they begin representations of themselves in words. A real art is at work as two people enter and re-enter each other's minds. They extend themselves out into space; leave wax impressions of themselves upon each other's minds; employ and take advantage of every device attendant upon language, such as inflection, gesture, bearing, etc. It may be that one has only said to the other: "Give me a glass of milk," and that the other has only replied: "I haven't any milk; I'll give you water," yet a tremendous mental activity has burned itself up in the transaction. They have taken each other's measure; they have played themselves up to each other; they have, in a sense, approximated themselves.

Whenever communication is of the particular-person type, one person to one other person, there is of necessity this approximation of selves. For proof of this, let someone call you on the telephone without revealing his identity. You will not know what to say.

You will, upon finding who it is, be ashamed or disconcerted about anything you may have said. Witness, too, your feeling at having someone read a personal letter, however harmless, that is addressed to you. We put ourselves so much into words during even the simplest of communications, that parts of our lives, parts of our characters, parts of our very inner beings are laid bare and exposed in them. Moreover, we seek desperately, sometimes, to conceal from one intimate friend the particular character we have exposed in our words to another.

*We put ourselves into words.* Here, in this type of communication, we put a particular part of self into words so as to make the best possible address to a particular person. What a burden these words bear! Hastily chosen though they are, and riding hard upon each other's heels, they must yet bear the personal flavor of the one who has summoned them. By comparison with the more advanced types of communication, the process is simplicity itself, for in man to man communication, the receptive mind draws words as though with a magnet from the active mind.

It is when a man delivers or posts his words where all and sundry can hear or read them, that he advances into a higher art. For now writer and reader do not see, do not know



each other. Hand cannot reach out and touch hand; a look into the eyes cannot give assurance of understanding or belief. A whole world may lie between the communicants.

And indeed a whole world does lie between each pair of us. Mentally, you are in your world; I am in mine. If I can see you, hear you, touch you, then I can tell what to say and how to say it. I am close enough to tell by various signs what manner of world you live in. Even if I am addressing a whole audience of you, I can see your faces before me; can jostle myself somehow into your world; can correct myself as I proceed; and so can make myself clear to you. But on paper, with you far away, a world, a dozen worlds roll between us. And we cannot talk to each other until we get into the same world. I must do one of two things in order to reach you. Whether my writing is journalism or literature in its tendency will depend upon which of these alternatives I choose.

First, I can suppose a world with which we are both familiar. This will simplify matters and put us in position to understand each other. But the world I suppose must be one that you, that any of you, will be ready and willing to suppose with me. It must be the most easily supposable of all worlds; it must

be the world in which all things are as they appear to be in the world that lies about us. Together we accept things-as-they-appear-to-be, and we agree to meet in that world to hold communion. We accept appearances without going very deeply below surfaces; we make no inquiry as to origins or outcomes; we deal with things. But we must be consistent. In order to keep you with me I must, now, stay always in the world in which we have met. I must accept all surface indications as real signs. I must be genuinely moved by superficial aspects. I must even go to war against any force that tends to break through the appearances of things.

When I choose words for my communication, I must be careful to employ them in their lowest common terms of meaning, knowing that they have added meanings beneath their surfaces, in that realm where we dare not, for the moment, penetrate. I must so use them that the first sense of meaning that would come to your mind, to any mind, will be the sense in which I want you to understand them. I must at all times preserve the illusion of things as they apparently are, in order that my mind can have a realm in which it can meet your mind while we are in different moods, different times, perhaps, and

are surrounded by different sets of circumstances.

It is not, then, the fact that a man writes for a newspaper that makes his writing journalistic. He may, indeed, write for newspapers all his life without being journalistic in his writing. It is rather that of the two possible worlds in which a writer can meet a great many readers, he has chosen the world in which, roughly approximated, everybody lives. He has chosen the day-to-day world, and so his writing is "diurnalistic."

Were I to make the second choice—the one leading away from journalism—I would *create* a world in which I and my readers might meet. This, too, is done with words. It is no longer necessary to say "Once upon a time," to let the reader know that the writer is creating a world. The writer creates his new world by so employing words that they cannot readily be made to apply to things in that world which is easiest for the reader to suppose. Thus, a sense of different-worldliness can be given in the first sentence, in the first phrase. The sentence will not go unless the word is taken in a sense that brings its full undercurrent of meaning into play in forwarding the movement of the thought. The surface is always broken through, for words are employed in their highest common terms

of meaning. This makes more difficult reading, usually, but it gives the writer fuller control and it gives the reader a greater sense of security, for he is under a more complete illusion. And the writer is no less bound to preserve the illusion of things-as-they-must-be in the world he has created.

Even the tiniest bit of real literature carries its own world upon its back—that is a great part of its value and charm. A little poem of four or eight lines has its words so arranged that the things for which these words stand must be caught up into a new world, a separate system, to be fully comprehended. This is highly important, aesthetically, for the revelation it gives, both to writer and to reader, of the possibilities of the human spirit. The writer, seeking to plumb the depths of his mind, and the reader, seeking to plumb the depths of his, meet agreeably in a world that neither of them could have entered save for the power of the human mind to call it into existence. The fact that they are there—that they can meet there and play there and talk there—proves them both to be the superior beings they have always wanted to prove themselves to be.

Now words stand for things, and things are in the world—some world. If you employ words journalistically, you leave the world

and all its things essentially as it was before. You accept all the face values, arrange your words with their plainest faces uppermost, and are careful not to disturb the orders, the measures, or the values that appear about you. You embrace the world of surfaces, and recommend it to a like intimate consideration on the part of your reader. If you employ words in the literary way, you remake the world in your reader's mind; you criticize it; you interpret it; you refashion it. You so tip all the words that are arranged in your pattern as to bring their uncommoner faces to the light. The result is a pattern not likely to be seen by looking out of the window, not likely to be seen without the guidance of the particular writer who is doing the work. Hence its fascination, and hence its extraordinary demand upon the whole of the writer's mind. Journalism can bring all the world of appearances to the door of the reader's mind; literature can bring to the reader experiences within the myriad of worlds that lie about him.

Nor is this distinction made for the purpose of pointing out that one art is higher than the other. In the matter of the complexity of technique, I think there is no difference: one is just as hard to do as the other. For "the world that everybody lives in" is no more real, when you come to represent it in

words, than is a world purely fanciful. The same necessity is laid upon the writer to make his world convincing, no matter what world he writes about. The chief differences in the two kinds of writing lie in the effects they have upon both writer and reader.

The journalist follows life: he is powerless to curb its direction. It is his lot to labor long over a thankless task: he begins with an enigma and ends with one. He can find out, little by little, what life is; but he can never make it anything else. Should he doubt for a moment that "whatever is, is right," he breaks the spell of illusion that binds him to his reader. He goes away from his task weary and heart-empty. There is for him no satisfaction of those instincts that cry aloud for satisfaction. He can best secure satisfaction and happiness by stifling his instincts, denying them, and dulling the edge of their insistence. If he can pretend to himself that the world of appearances is the real world and the only world, his writing is more genuine and he becomes a better journalist for the pretence, no matter what effect this has upon his inner life.

This is precisely what good journalists have done, and what our journalism-fed population is rapidly doing. I have no comment to make, just here, about whether or not this tendency is a good one.



The literary man, on the other hand, leads life at every step. Never is he content to let it be what it merely is; always he is busy making it what it might be. This gives him in his own right the range and depth of life that his heart craves. It gives him variety of experience, satisfaction of curiosity, wide social intercourse, deep insight into difficult situations. To his reader it gives all of these gifts, and adds to them the understanding and companionship of the writer's mind.

As far as actual writing is concerned, any good journalist can write well enough to become a good novelist, and some journalists write much better than some very good novelists. But one cannot progress from journalism into literature. The two arts do not bear that relation to each other. I think one must come to the place where he is willing to renounce the world-as-it-is, and to forego its benefits, before he can aspire to literary authorship. Until he does that, his words will not assemble a new world for him. I would not have him withdraw from the world; rather I think he should penetrate it, break through the crust of it and bury himself deeply in the very thick of life. When he has done that, his words will not sound to the average man like the echoes of his own thoughts, but rather like a voice from the

ground beneath his feet or from the sky over his head, addressing him out of some heaven that is only just at his elbow, accessible if he will but read and listen.

Journalism must call more loudly than literature for its patrons, because it is addressing them, and holding them, in a world from which they would be glad to break away. It succeeds best when it puts itself in such a place that it cannot be overlooked, and when it puts meanings in such terms as cannot be mistaken in their lower values. Literature can stand aloof, and its patrons will be driven to it by their own heart-hunger. It succeeds best when it puts itself in such a place as to need some seeking, and when its meanings are put in such terms that an other-wordly glow is thrown over everything it deals with. Obviously, these two separate arts call for different kinds of people in their creation.

I want to insist simply upon a complete distinction between journalism and literature. I want to end the confusion that calls poor literature, journalism; that calls good journalism, literature. Journalism can never become literature by being well written, in the sense in which I am using these two terms. It can become good, or even great, journalism, and that is what every journalist ought to aspire to. Nor can literature, by being poor,

become journalism. It becomes merely poor literature. The lines of direction in the development of these two arts diverge from their starting-points and can never meet again. If any man can write both, it is simply that he possesses the power of changing himself over from one kind of person to another. If any man progresses from journalism into literature, it is not a progress but a re-determination; he has become dissatisfied with his first art, has gone back to his starting-point and has made himself over. He takes a new attitude toward life and the world about him, a new way of looking at things, a new way of using words. It is the way in which a man uses words, and the purpose for which he uses them, that determines whether his tendency is in the direction of journalism or in the direction of literature.

VI  
LEARNING TO WRITE



## *Learning to Write*

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Just as the body undergoes a complete change every seven years by the sloughing off of old elements and the making of new ones through the food we eat, so the mind also undergoes a change of character every time it becomes dominated by a new idea. Through natural inclination and the force of changing circumstances, one after another of the types of ideas that compose the vast domain of the mind gain the ascendancy and strut their brief hour in rather complete control of the inner and the outer man. That idea which is most compatible with the nature of a person and that is best adapted to meeting the conditions he has to face, can most easily seize the power of the mind and, ruling in high state, can direct the disposal of all the remaining forces to the accomplishment of its own ends and purposes. This is the fixed-idea or fixed group-of-ideas that forms the central principle of each individual life. Both conscious and unconscious function will be found to drift in the direction of satisfying every whim of the fixed-idea.

For the very longing to be a writer, the secret practice at writing, as well as the final determination to write, are all signs of the ascendancy of one group of ideas in the mind.

It is in this mental state that a student-writer finds himself. Once the desire for authorship takes a foothold in the mind, the character of that mind begins to change. It slowly becomes organized, for it begins to dwell, in its unhurried moments, upon those elements in its content that can contribute to the further ascendancy of the ruling idea. There is, at the outset a slow-burning inventory of the mind's forces and powers, of its accumulated content, and of its conveyor system of association-paths by means of which immediate delivery of any selected content can be assured. More than that, there is actual practice recall and practice delivery that serves to strengthen those branches of mental activity that are going to be of use in the later fulfillment of the heart's wish.

As I have pointed out in another place, it is the imagination that controls and orders this kind of activity. The student imagines himself writing; he imagines himself writing verse; he imagines himself writing prose. They are such things as he reads during this period; they are such things as have never been written before. In his imagining, he meets the various problems of writing and solves them, after some fashion, for himself. That particular kind of writing with which he has the most success in his purely mental au-



thorship will, in time, attach itself permanently to the fixed-idea that is governing his mind, and sooner or later he will find himself actually writing just that kind of thing.

I say he "finds himself writing," for up to this point he has not needed to give attention to the change of character that his mind is undergoing. The phenomenon is self-directive, because it takes place in the mind. It is with the period of activity, of productivity, that we have chiefly to deal, for now conscious action begins to result from a long train of thought that was largely unconscious, or at least unnoticed. He finds himself writing, but there is no coordination yet between brain and hand. He *must* write. The writing is strange, highflown, extravagant, but altogether sacred. He identifies the fierce, wonderful fire of his brain with the crude, halting, overblown words upon the page, and to his eye—more to his inner eye than to his outer eye—it appears that he has excelled the masters. He has started, now, learning how to write.

But the period of accumulating and classifying material for writing has by no means ended. The mind never ceases this kind of activity as long as the writing idea is dominant. Throughout the period of learning to write and throughout however long a period

of authorship, this process continues; the store of material becomes richer and richer; the paths of delivery for thoughts, feelings and images become better and better worn; the actual formation of new material from an infinite number of combination—and association—possibilities goes on apace. Without ever needing to give attention to this department of his work, the student becomes better and better prepared for writing by merely living from day to day under the control of the writing-impulse.

And he is, indeed, better off for giving no attention at all to his mental preparation, if he is to write real literature. For if he attempt to interfere with the natural course of his mind, he will destroy the natural flavor of his writing. To go about studying human character with a deliberate view to its depiction in writing, puts one into an attitude of insincerity with his fellows and predisposes his conclusions to falsity. Man's mind is a well-balanced machine adequately adjusted for the complete assimilation of the universe. If a man make demands, periodically, upon his mind for a surrender of its accumulated conclusions, that mind will labor the harder and the faster to accumulate conclusions to fulfill his demands. The material out of which these conclusions are drawn is so com-

plex, so multifarious, so completely untraceable to its source that it is best for the writer to take without question or correction what the mind naturally offers. This is the doctrine of literary naturalism.

Under the complete domination of his mind's content (with the fixed idea presiding) the writer has then only to read his thoughts, feelings and images in their own terms and translate them into words. He is translating, then, from a language known only to himself into a language known to all men. He is taking the stuff of mind and putting it into the terms of matter in such a form as will most readily and easily absorb back again into any mind that is exposed to it. The writer's task does not stop on the paper. It is finished only when he has created in the reader's mind just such a disturbance as was present in his own mind during the course of his writing. The cycle of art is from mind through matter back to mind again, and art is not achieved until that cycle is complete. Hence the necessity that is laid upon the writer for making himself clear.

It is obvious, then, that the process of learning to write has not begun and cannot begin until the student begins writing. When he is studying theory without relation to his own mind's content and when he is studying

the writings of others to see how they wrote, he is learning something, assuredly, but he is not learning to write. In studying solutions to general writing problems he learns the answers to questions less than half of which will need to be answered in his own peculiar case. And the half that is pertinent will be of no value to him until his life is actually troubled by the questions they answer.

The writer needs a fabric of words for the translation of his thought. No one can teach him words; no one can tell him what words he needs; for no one knows what thought he is trying to translate. The daily memorization of a word list would waste a great deal of the writer's energy. He needs to know only those words for which he has thoughts and feelings. The meaning is primary with him, the word secondary. For this reason, a thesaurus is of more value to him than a dictionary, although he must have both. His constant problem is the selection of a word to express a meaning; he should never look for a meaning to suit a word he wants to use. Consequently he will most frequently find himself hunting down in a thesaurus some meaning that he has in mind, tracing it to narrow and narrower limits, until he comes upon the actual word-list in which he can find the precise word he needs. The word chosen should

not be one unfamiliar to him: he should use the book to help his memory.

Once he has made a search and found the exact word, he has settled one problem forever. That one word in that one sense of meaning is forever his; he will not need to look it up again. More than in any other activity, a writer's training consists in taking the time and taking the pains to come upon the best word for his purpose. Nine-tenths of the student's time should be spent in deciding just how to say what he is thinking. Every search that he makes, particularly if it is an exhaustive one, adds one more word permanently to the writer's equipment. His fabric grows slowly at first, but more and more rapidly and with less and less effort as time goes on. As it grows, it becomes in a sense an instrument of thought, for every word so added to a writer's vocabulary is one that is identified in every angle of its meaning with a particular shade of thought that he has actually created, himself.

The thought, the feeling, the image is first present, wordless, or roughly approximated in words: it is the author's own. He finds the best words for it and so makes it accessible to others. Thus the words he acquires stand for the thoughts he has had. Soon a ready flow of them is his, marking how smooth and sure

is the path of his thought. Over these paths will later come more subtle, more complex thoughts, made available through the instrumentality of the first ones; and the first words, by combination with those acquired later, will come forth charged with a newer and newer vitality as time goes on. Thus the path that is first cut through the trees from a logging-camp, becomes, when the camp becomes a city, the paved road over which is drawn the finished, polished furniture-product that those logs have made. And the writer's words become characteristic of him: they stand for the thoughts he has had. They are a mark of his style, for they show the style of his thinking.

Besides a fabric of words, a writer needs a flexibility of constructions for the translation of his thought. He must know about the changes that words undergo for the purpose of combining themselves with other words. He must know about the changes they undergo when assuming different shades of meaning. He must know about those changes that are entirely arbitrary and conventional. To know these things he must, of course, be very familiar with the language in which he writes. He must know something of the principle upon which the language is inflected; he must have an acquaintance with that language's

literature; he must know something of the sources from which that language came. This seems like a dreadful requirement, but there is no escaping it. Without a knowledge of grammar, of usage, and of etymology, the language cannot become flexible in the hands of any writer.

But no writer needs an exhaustive scientific knowledge of any of these subjects. Having found the best word to fit his meaning, he can now find all that anybody needs to know about that word by referring to a good dictionary. The student will use a dictionary extensively in deciding upon constructions; he will find in it the etymology, the usage, the grammar of any word he intends to use. Most people pay no attention to the dictionary entries that give this information, and pass over them hurriedly. But most people are readers, not writers. A reader uses the dictionary to find the meaning of a word: reading goes that way, from word to meaning. But a writer works in the opposite direction: he uses a thesaurus to find a word for a meaning. When he uses a dictionary, he is concerned only with the parts of the entry that are printed in italics. He wants to know what background this word has, how it may be used, what changes it must undergo in order to express the meaning he wants to convey in



the sentence that is taking shape in his head.

A writer should have the best dictionary he can get, and he should use the same one all the time. He will need to familiarize himself with it, because all of the information he is seeking is conveyed in abbreviated words. A table of these abbreviations is given in the front of every dictionary, and by referring to this table he can soon learn the words for which these abbreviations stand. As to their meaning, he need not puzzle long, for he has a dictionary in his hands and can look them up.

The process of acquiring mastery over construction is, like the process of acquiring words, a very slow one at the outset. But here, too, progress is rapid. Everything that is learned is actually learned once and forever, because a real need on the part of the writer is driving him to the discovery, and he makes the knowledge a part of his mental equipment by employing it immediately in a piece of writing that is identified with his whole being. Thus, he never has to learn the same thing twice, as people do who have no pressing need for knowledge at the time of its acquisition. Moreover, every bit of his acquired knowledge adds to the efficiency of his mental instrument and enables him the more easily and swiftly to acquire more. He

soon has a sense for constructions that enables him to forge powerful or beautiful phrases and sentences without reference to any authority beyond his own feeling as to their fitness. Beyond this point, development is so rapid as almost to be untraceable. Power in one department gives power all along the line.

A writer needs, too, a sense of form in his work. I do not mean that his work needs to take on a particular form as he writes, or that any man or any book can tell him what form his work ought to take. I mean that he ought to live close enough to the impulses and instincts that drive him to his work so that he can tell when he is through. "A sense of form" is then a sense of completeness. Any form is a worthy form if it is adequate to the content. The only formless writings are those that start in the middle, or sag in the middle, or end in the middle. Such a work is torn away from the writer's mind inadequate, incomplete. It is not all on the paper. Part of it is still in the writer's mind. He has responded to an impulse to write, but his mechanism of response has not been delicate enough in defining exactly where that impulse began and where it ended. Or, in his blundering transcription of it, he has destroyed the balance of its elements. I think there are two

ways of developing a sense of form: one is by waiting long for the complete formation of a work before rushing it down on paper; the other is by probing carefully all around such a work while it is still in its mental state in order to detect which of its roots may be cut at the stem and which must be preserved in the transplanting.

This sense of form must be applied to all the units of a literary work. I think there is no rule for the making of sentences that will apply in all cases, except the rule that a sentence ought to be a unit of writing and a complete one. Its extent, its balance, its rhythm, all its other qualities must be determined by the kind of mind-stuff it is soaked in. The balance of sentences against each other is no less delicate a task. But the writer does not need to keep his eye upon a rule-book if he has something to say. He needs mostly to hold back the rush of words and of sentences until he can choose them, trim them, balance them and arrange their order so as to approximate as nearly as possible and as fully as possible the whole complicated thought-stream that is ready to be worded.

The paragraph, too, is a unit. It completes something. The writer must wait for its completion before he can write it, or he must probe carefully around it, testing its extent,

weighing it against his other paragraphs, before he decides what its limits ought to be.

So, too, with the complete work. It needs mainly to be complete. No one has ever objected to the "form" of any work of art if that form was adequate, if that work was complete. It is in the attempt to render fragments that a beginner has trouble with form. A completed thing has character, recognizable character; it stands on its own feet. A fragment is a fragment, whether it is a sentence without a verb, a freak poem half-expressing a mood, or a novel with the last chapter torn out. And a work may be just as far from complete, even though it goes through to the end intended, if all of its units have not been carefully gone over in the light of its total effect, and made to play their best parts in rendering that effect unmistakably.

The difficulty of writing sentences and paragraphs and even short stories according to rule is that a false sense of security is given to the writer. He is assembling thought-stuff out of his own head; the rules only govern the assemblage of words. A writer depends upon the rules and thinks that he has a sentence when he has satisfied the requirements of one. Unless he writes his sentence with direct reference to the burden of material with which he is dealing, and in a whole-

hearted attempt to set forth in full one unit of that material, his sentence will not do. If he make a paragraph to illustrate the "laws" of paragraphing rather than with reference to his task of blocking off a new thought-division, he may assume far too early that he has a good paragraph. If he write a short story, fulfilling all the conditions a short story is supposed to fulfill, he cannot by any means be sure that he has a story. And the difficulty is that he will not test the ring and temper of his product with anything like the care and delicacy he would have employed if he had drafted and forged every unit of it himself.

I have not mentioned what a student writer gets from reading. I think it is not too much to say that he gets just everything he needs at the moment that he needs it. Early in his study he will pass through short periods of imitating the style of the authors he reads, but this should not alarm him. If he has something to say himself, the other man's style will never get it said adequately for him, and sooner or later he will drop the imitation and forge his own style. If he has nothing, himself, to say, he will never get a style of saying it, and so he is better off with someone else's style than with none at all. But wherever he reads, wherever he looks, once he has undertaken the task of learning

to write, helps and hints and new insights into his problems will be lying in wait for him. They are lying in wait for everybody, but only the mind that is determined upon the course of writing recognizes them and snaps them up.

So marvelous and so sensitive a mechanism is the mind of man that, once it is bent upon the accomplishment of a given end, it works under its own power, adapting and adjusting itself to the conditions it must meet. I even believe it is capable of enlarging its capacity, unaided, to such a point as is necessary in doing what is expected of it. When a person seriously sets himself the task of learning to write; when he begins to construct a fabric of words to translate the meanings his mind knows; when he begins to familiarize himself with constructions and to generate a sense of form; it is as though the gods were with him. His mind reorganizes itself in terms of the wish that is closest to his heart, and, taking on a new character, grows in the direction of that wish's fulfillment. It takes up readily and permanently not alone such material as it is consciously directed toward, but a wealth of miscellany that is scarcely noticed by the writer. This it works upon, waking and sleeping, selecting, absorbing, arranging, un-

til there is nothing left for the writer to do toward his own writing but to transcribe.

Learning to write requires, more than anything else, learning to be patient and learning to be thorough. The patience and thoroughness a writer employs in his early efforts serve to form his background as a craftsman, and to determine in a great measure how far he will go along the road toward literary art.



VII  
AUTHOR AND CRITIC



## Author and Critic

A thousand essays have been written to define the relation of author and critic. Unless there is a principle in these essays of mine that makes for a clearer statement of that relation, then there can be no cause for adding this paper to the list. But I believe that the principle of which I speak is already apparent, and I am prepared to enlarge upon that principle. It is simply that the true creative artist is quite independent of the benefits of formal criticism and quite innocent of its standards of judgment. I find ample evidence in support of this view.

First, it is to be noted that I am speaking of formal critics: those men who have appointed themselves to the task of keeping contemporary literature free from flaws and blemishes; the discoverers and propagators of the eternal "principles of art." I have no word against literary advice that the author has gone after himself and *asked for*. The fact of seeking it is proof enough that he needs it, and that he will know how to use it when it is given.

Second, it is to be noted that I am speaking of the true creative artist. Let pass those writers whose art consists in analysis and synthesis. Their work is only a highly skillful

degree of imitation, based upon works that have been before their time. They need the critic to find for them their principles, so that they may go on. The creative artist does better than they do; he creates. And critics have always withdrawn from a man who can do that. They call him genius and give up trying to account for him. "This is the refined fire," they say; and well they may say it, for since the man has employed none of their sacred principles, they do not know what to make of him. The critic, after all, can only speak to and speak for the writer who bases his writing, either in substance or in manner, upon the findings of criticism. And such a writer has always been admitted to be of the lesser sort. Every important literary work in the history of that art has been flung full in the face of criticism. It is the nature of art to transcend.

"Here is genius," we cry, whenever a really new creation is brought forth. We expect so little of art! "Here is simply creative art," we ought rather to say, for it is only now and again that an artist frees himself from the tradition which critics throw around him. It is art, in last analysis, that creates principles, if indeed there is any necessity for principles being created. Only a true artist can know how unbelievably insecure is the

basis of his typical practice in writing, and only a true artist can experience that shock of unworthiness that comes with seeing his practice converted into "principles." Homer, re-born, could spend a long life reading simply the principles of his own writing. (And he would die an ignorant man!) Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, have already given rise to a hundred times the volume of their own works. Yet not a principle discovered in the whole bulk of this critical study is going to be of any *direct value* to future art, for creative art is not based upon principles. It creates anew its own principles at the moment of conception.

I am going to set forth that it is this very preoccupation with principles—in choice of subject and in generation of form—that trammels and inhibits the free outpouring of art. I am prevented, times without number, from pouring my own personality out upon paper, because the standard tools with which the critics have provided me will not properly lay hold of it. It is only when I shake myself free of their domination and center all of my interests upon myself and my own task for my own satisfaction that I can get any good result. Perhaps this is a stubborn perversity, yet I am convinced that many a writer's best work is done in a moment when he

ought, logically, to be engaged in committing suicide. Only in such a moment does one live entirely with one's own mind. All the external interests are withdrawn and every faculty is freed to devote itself to that complete realization of internal wonder which has so far failed to come. Critics as well as creditors drive writers to such moments as this, and for doing it they ought to be thanked. But as for adhering to artistic "principles": the artist has no more thought of it in such a moment than he has of reimbursing his creditors. Such principles as are right and eternal and true will be discoverable in his work, no doubt, if that work is honestly and carefully wrought: the author is powerless to make his work illustrate any given one, and he is foolish to attempt the task. What a true creative artist has to give has always pleased the critic more than slavish adherence to his principles ever can. What a true creative artist has to give is an experience with the wonder of human personality, for himself, for the critic, for every other human being. It is in that moment of surprise and wonder, when he stands uncovered before the thing all men are seeking, that the critic gives up and murmurs, "Genius!"

It is this word, kept in reserve for this occasion, which at once "gives away" the critic

and points the way for the aspiring writer. It is clearly enough to be seen that the critic is to be come upon from his human side. He is no more to the artist, then, than is the man who lives next door. It is only as appreciator that the critic has any place in the artist's scheme. It is only whether his work is liked or is not liked that an author desires chiefly to know. The reason why in any case is usually irrelevant to the work, and sometimes ridiculously impertinent; at all times it comes so sadly *after the fact* of creation as to be of slight importance.

Yet the rigid lineaments of literary "form," for which the critic's eye hungers, are all symbols of attainment in literary art. They have strong historical value and are splendid things to contemplate. The epic poem, the sonnet, the metrical drama, the novel—these have all served mankind abundantly in revealing life. They have even, in their variations, revealed life in widely separated quarters. They have been vehicles for the translation of vastly different personalities. I only insist that each time any of these forms have been used with full effect, they have been invented anew by the user. And that particular user was driven to that particular invention by the peculiar make-up of his personality.



Now it happens to be true that, once confronted with the necessity for inventing a particular art-form, the artist must make some exploration of that form. This exploration is a process that is strangely like what we call study. Yet it is, just as strangely, an entirely different process. In the difference between these two kinds of study lies a good deal of the difference between artist and critic. These two classes of people differ not alone momentarily and superficially, but also fundamentally. The differing processes by which they grow cause them to develop in diverging directions. I want to distinguish these two processes so as to show the relation of author and critic in their origin; in their early practice of their respective arts; and in their full maturity.

In the ordinary sense of the term, study divides a given field into plots of equal size, and, beginning at one corner of one of these, "goes over the ground" thoroughly. Everything that it encounters must be examined carefully, identified accurately, and tested for qualities that might some time prove useful. There is no discrimination, and may not be. This kind of study is bound to investigate whatever lies in its field. It does not know what it is seeking; it is not, in fact, seeking anything; it is merely seeking. This I shall

call casual study. It is characteristic of the school system. The student is introduced to a field of study in which there is nothing that he wants, immediately, to know. He is not driven into that field by forces within himself; rather by forces from without. He gets started as a casual student by entering a compulsory school system, and there he forms habits of casual study that persist all through life. He is not, at any point, definitely looking for anything. Gradually he is introduced to various motives (from without) that make the methods of the system seem plausible enough, and these motives soon take such possession of him that the further development of any natural process is obscured. He forms his life in terms of the living present, and is glad enough to find himself in possession, at any given moment, of things which men around him appear to be seeking.

In contrast to the casual student stands the person who, in a moment of unregulated contemplation, has managed to hear his soul speaking, or trying to speak, and who has maintained enough of his native curiosity to want to know what it has to say. I shall call this one the vital student. Every teacher knows him. With him, it is not touch and go; it is touch and *stay*. He does not know what he wants, perhaps, but he certainly

knows when he is getting it. There is no slow going-over of a field of study for him; no groping on all fours. A bare moment of sniffing at the corner of a field and he is off, bolting "across lots" to the very heart of that field. There he will bury himself to the waist, to the neck, if need be, in his search for specimens. Everything he can use, he will pop into his sack: he throws away at a glance hundreds of articles which casual students would treasure. He will work like one possessed, and indeed he *is* possessed. He has a problem.

The distinction, then, between a casual student and a vital student lies wholly in the fact that the latter is at work upon a problem toward the solution of which he is impelled by a combination of all of his instincts, operating from within; the casual student is not even seeking such a problem. He is concerned with accumulating all the answers to all the possible problems in his field, though he has none of his own. It is, in short, *need*, that is the vitalizing principle in education. And soul-need can call louder than any economic need can ever call.

I need hardly point out that it is the vital type of study in which the coming artist engages during that period in which he is generating the mold and character of his thoughts. His mind is set (as I have said in another

place) with ten thousand little traps, each one ready to spring shut upon any fragment that promises to be useful in solving his mind's problem. The artist is irritable, disinterested, absent-minded. He is in a period of meditation. He is trying, in the truest sense, to fit himself and his universe together. The "form" that he will generate is as much a product of his meditation as is the substance with which he will fill it. Both the honey and the comb are made by the same bee.

During vital study, an artist is selecting from his immediate impressions and experiences, as well as from those with which his mind was previously provided, such material as he needs for the accomplishment of the task he has in mind. The principle upon which he makes his selection is one that is unknown to him, but one that is nevertheless operative and in control of his strange conduct. It is the principle of his own inner being, or at least, of that manifestation of his own inner being that is at that moment struggling for expression.

It is in the complete work that this principle is first disclosed. There for the first time it is available for analysis even by the casual student. And the casual student, finding it, makes the mistake of supposing that because this principle is elusive, it is therefore

highly important. But this is not true. The principle of the operation of a man's mind during the generation of any literary work is not, that given work aside, important at all. It has no predictive value, and cannot be used again save by that same mind in the presence of precisely the same set of phenomena. The honey without the comb is, as Mr. John Burroughs has pointed out, rather poor honey. Even so, it is much better tasting stuff than is the comb without the honey.

The casual student cannot, by the methods he pursues, prepare himself for forward-going work of any kind. This is as true in engineering as it is in literary study. If he has persistence and stamina he will come out in possession of great knowledge in his own field. He will be an admirable judge and critic of everything that falls within that field. If his field is letters, he will become a literary critic.

Casual study leaps to knowledge by accumulating principles, qualities, measures. It can recite its accomplishments; it is sensitive to tests and examinations; it has many more answers than problems. Vital study develops by forming and by informing the spirit. It accomplishes, but cannot recite its accomplishments; it is not sensitive to tests; it is heavy with problems and eager for answers. Here-

in are distinguished, in point of genesis, the critic and the creator. And of course these two types exist in all fields of study. The former seem to be the many who are called; the latter are apparently the few who are chosen. Yet the latter group is not, I believe, distinguished by any extraordinary internal wonder. All men may not have equally complex or equally wonderful minds and personalities, yet I am convinced that even the shabbiest of human personalities is a thing to be marvelled at. More than that, its light is bright enough brilliantly to illumine a life, once tear away the bushel under which it is hidden.

Once tear away that darkening bushel! We do not yet know the full secret of that. But we do know that by strange, sudden convulsions of the human spirit the bashful wall-flower suddenly sings to the delight of the angels; the zealous persecutor turns about and becomes the powerful champion; the blind, the deaf, the dumb surmount their respective disqualifications. Yet we make no provisions for such miracles in our scheme of life. More pitifully still, we so construct our systems that any such irregular performance is dealt with harshly, either by direct action or by indirect influence. In the nature of things, the inventor languishes for lack of ap-

paratus; genius is expelled from school; saviors are crucified. Owing all that we have to irregularity of one sort and another, we yet employ our laws and our social disapproval in enforcing regularity. We insist upon drilling in casual study even that student who is burdened with a vital problem.

Author and critic meet most often and quarrel most bitterly on that level of art where both are just emerging into maturity: where the author writes books, and the critic reviews them. The "author" is conscious of weaknesses in his fledgling effort: he is learning to write. The "critic" knows that his half-learned eternal principles will not carry him far. Loud and bold and with the overzeal of boys trying to out-bluff each other, they hurl their best at each other's heads. Before the game is fully under way, both contestants have violated the rules and stepped out of their circles. Then both of them cry: "Unfair!" On this level, where a real battle is constantly raging, the critic, having the last word, "lays down the law" to the young author, and oversteps his own judgment and his own best convictions in forcing his young adversary to adhere to difficult and distasteful standards. It is this kind of procedure, so characteristic of the perennial literary "movements," that throws all



critics into a kind of disfavor. It is the younger and more immature of critics who seize in the name of criticism broad fields of action that no seasoned critic would attempt to defend.

Some literature is in prose and some is in verse. Yet no man has ever been able to classify the possible subjects for literature and to say which of them must be treated in the one medium, which in the other. Neither are we able to say that a given mood will be a verse-mood regardless of the material its interest attaches to. Prose has always come when prose *would* come, and verse when verse *would* come. We have always let the writer and his personality dictate that much. How, then, shall we dictate form within these larger divisions? We let him write verse because we cannot tell him what better to write, yet now we insist that his verse be of a particular sort and adhere, to the letter, to the latest conventional standard. I say latest, because that same standard was once a violent revolution from some previous fixed form.

I anticipate objections here which I have often enough met. No one, you say at once, is legislating for the artist. Perhaps not deliberately; yet all about you are thousands of schoolboys reciting their creed:

"A sonnet has fourteen lines."

This is all they know and all they are permitted to know about a sonnet. And as things stand, a great many of those same schoolboys will get themselves jobs as critics and book-reviewers. And half of these, in their first burst of commencement smartness, will "click off" a careless review dismissing with scorn somebody's poem that fairly leaps with life, because a line has too many feet, or too few feet, or one deformed foot. The critic who is equipped in the manner indicated above can find only what he is looking for. Not new faces; not character that shines out of the eyes in passing; not any human trait stamped upon a countenance caught sight of in the throng; no, only the feet, the number of them, the measure of them. The while the critic mutters to himself, more bitterly and more vehemently as he grows older:

"A sonnet *must* have fourteen lines!"

Poor fellow! His crabbed irregularity comes of an ailment that love of art could cure. An element is lacking in the diet, and the starved tissues dry up for want of it. Yet he is dabbling in that element every day of his life. But, like the glazier who spends his life puttying and puttering around windows, he never thinks of looking in at one just for

fun. How I have seen critics take up a manuscript or a book! There is that long, slow heaving of the shoulders, as though settling them to a new burden; the crinkles of wisdom come unbidden to the corners of the eyes; the first languid ruffling of a sheaf of pages. He is ready to begin. But first he must look up. His face is drawn, sorrowful; the face of a man too often fooled. He is willing to bet that he knows the answer. Ah! These critics willing to bet, certain to win, dealers and players! Now a film creeps over his eye; he has made his bet; he plays to win.

In the higher realms of literature and criticism the atmosphere is, of course, rarer, and personalities are few and far between. The great writer of an age is easily distinguishable from the mere writers of books who cluster around him. Just so does the great critic stand out from among the mere book-reviewers who practice his trade. The great critic is a scholar of considerable magnitude. He is engaged in work that is of inestimable benefit to mankind. He clarifies and purifies and vivifies literature. He makes an enduring record of what is, after all, the acme of appreciation. He appraises and evaluates, canonizes and anathematizes upon the basis of the best principles and the soundest sense he can command. He deserves enduring glory

along with that accorded to the great writer.

Yet, after all, the great critic is no nearer to the creative writer of his own day, and can help him no more, than the critic of less eminence. His work is done not for the writer, but for the reader. If his writings are, on account of their abstruse character and their erudition, a sealed book to the general reader, then they are for the guidance of the minor critics. The work is nevertheless done for the reader, though at one remove from him.

Actually, there is no one working for the direct benefit of the creative writer, and, in the nature of the case, there does not need to be. He works directly upon life and nature a process very similar to the one which the critic works upon art. He digests it, analyses it, studies the effect it has upon him and so conducts himself that that effect gets itself recorded. Aside from an idle curiosity about each other, author and critic can have no direct relation. The artist does not interfere with the critic; the critic does not press very closely upon the artist's heels. In point of genesis, literature is always free to do as it pleases. The real critic not only refrains from suggesting how one ought to get up a work of art; he is as naively curious about the process as is a little child. And the real author has for the real critic only the kindest

consideration—as for one who labors to make a public that is interested in literary art, and that is capable of appreciating some of the finest effects he may himself achieve.

Artists and critics are different kinds of persons because of the different directions of their growth. They occupy different realms. They can never (neither in this article nor in someone's criticism of it) quite touch each other, either for good or harm.

The artist must be left free to interpret life by reflecting upon it with his own mind. To ask life what it would like in the way of an interpretation of itself, and then to give it what it asks for, is simple folly. No real art can ever be achieved in that way. And the writer who bases his writing upon the findings of criticism would be doing just that.



VIII  
PUBLICATION





## *Publication*

Strictly speaking, an author will meet all of the problems peculiar to authorship while he has a pen in his hand. And there are enough of these. The conception and transcription of works of literature will be found to be a sufficiently absorbing task to call for all of the energy he possesses. It is too much to expect him to be expert or even adept in any field that lies outside of literary creation. Yet such a field exists for him, and he must live very close to it. It is the field of book-making and book-purveying, and it touches him insofar as he is a producer of book material.

Authors do not write books; they write manuscripts. They pile up heap after heap of scrawled and interlined and corrected and smeared pages, lavishing upon these all their tenderest care and finest workmanship. Even when they have finished, there is nothing to exhibit with pride, nothing to show off in a shop window, nothing to expect anyone to read. Nobody in the world, but an author, loves a manuscript, and he loves only his own. Lovers of literature love books; mostly, it is true, for their content, but now and again for their own beauty and taste and fitness. Their very judgment of literary quality is bound up, more than they know, with

such externals as print and paper and binding. The things that they like are always better liked when presented to them in good form, and this is true even of the most cultured of them. It is the printer who stands, as secondary artist, somewhere between the author and his public.

And behind the printer stands the publisher, who represents the eternal "trial by market to which all things come." However much an author may cringe from it, he must put his work through this fierce test before the cycle of his art is complete. Here it will be argued about and fought over by people who care little about its delicate and subtle values and less about the author's finer sensibilities. Here it will be put to judgment by unknown parties who, pressed and harassed by their own problems, are in no mood for leniency. Here it will be weighed for all its own internal worth, on the one hand, and balanced, on the other hand, against the money market, business competition and depression, and a hundred other factors that bear no direct relation to it. And like as not, yea, liker than not, it will come back with scarcely a clue as to which of the many considerations weighed heaviest against it. To the author, whose heart and soul are in the manuscript, this is a blow scarcely to be borne.

I should advise him not to bear it, not even to expose himself to it. The despondency and heart-ache and misery it generates are so profound as to destroy the balance of his life, because his sensitiveness makes them so. He does not need these extra burdens, for he has, aside from his authorship, all the cares and trials which beset mortals anywhere. It is no trouble for him, and indeed it is an advantage to his craftsmanship, to ward off such blows. He can ward them off by transferring his heart and soul and his tenderest affections to a new task before he sends out a completed manuscript. It is always the latest conception that is the dearest—the one in which the author is at the moment immersed. Let him start a new piece of work and get absorbed in it, and no one can seriously harm him through harsh treatment of the old one. Let him never send his youngest boy to mill.

The advantage to his craftsmanship is direct. Let him withdraw his heart's interest from a finished work and put that interest in a new one that is coming on; let him take a rest from his long labor; and in a little time he will have a fresh mind with which to view the earlier work before he places it on trial. He will the more readily see its faults and weaknesses; he will the less readily forgive its imperfections, for it is no longer saturated

with his affection. Even the second work will profit from the loss of time and attention at this moment. Only the true and most vital parts will survive the interim. The whole value of it will be proven by its response to a second impulse when the author returns to it.

Then too, if the first one is actually published, the author will remain an author in spite of the distractions furnished by that trying period. For an author's business is with his manuscript; it is not with the public that reads and makes unaccountable comments, nor is it with the commercial aspect of the book business. It is his manuscript that makes him, that keeps him, an author. If he have none to work upon, he is, for the time, something else. There is no accounting for the kind or the quality of the ideas that can take possession of him once he has overthrown the one group of ideas around which his mind has organized itself. Give him no authorship to be concerned about, and he is unbalanced, uncontrolled. He has come to depend upon his ideas, for they are sound—made by the co-operation of all of his faculties. Released from authorship, the one principle that binds together his ideas and that presides over his mind, is gone. His thoughts become worthless, yet he puts the same reliance in them. An author is a deliberate monomaniac: if he

maintain a direct relation to his authorship, he can go far; if he break off that relation-ship, he may become a fool.

The judgments of the publishing field are business judgments. There is nothing in an author's training that fits him to render them. Unless he maintains his authorship directly by his writing, even through the thick and thin of negotiations with publishers, and unless he looks upon these negotiations entirely through the eyes of authorship, particularly with reference to his own feeling for his own work, he is almost certain to make grievous mistakes. As author, he can trust his judgment, for his mind is organized around the principle of authorship; as business man or social lion he is not fitted for competition.

Since the publishing field is extraneous to art, the author's attitude toward it is clear. No consideration arising in that field can have any beneficial effect upon his writing, and he must carry his work through to completion without reference to that field. It is only when the work of art is completed that it becomes eligible for publication, and it must be completed in such manner as seems best to the author. To write with one eye upon the demands of publishers is to write falsely and to fail of producing art.

There need be, I think, no further state

ment of the principle here involved. Neither the critic, the scholar, nor the publisher usually can have any good influence upon a work that is generating. This is not because critic, scholar and publisher do not know anything about art, but simply because art consists in the reflection made by one whole mind upon life. Usually no person other than the author can have a finger in its making. The young writer will do well to settle this question in his mind very early.

The joy of publication is, after all, an "added something," over and above the full joy of authorship which comes with the successful completion of a manuscript. If some one wants to publish that manuscript, well and good. The writer's art can then swing full circle. He can have, in addition to full joy, full satisfaction and reward. If no one wants to publish it, the author's satisfaction is more strictly bounded, because then there will be only a few choice spirits to read it. But an author loves chiefly to write, and no one can keep him from doing that. If it is the handling of books he loves, he should be a librarian; if the smell of fresh ink, he should be a printer. So long as he is a genuine author, he will find in his heart much fortitude against failure to publish. The period of anticipation is more thrilling, anyway, than is



the period after publication. It is not, when you get to it, what you thought it was going to be before you got there.

And there is no escaping the trial of it; no short cut past the publisher can ever be provided. For an author cannot publish his own work. Not only is such a course costly and risky; it is cheapening as well. Works "published by the author" brand themselves, in the minds of most people, as failures. There is a kind of lack of delicacy, too, in such an act. The writer proclaims a little too loudly, a little too blatantly, that he believes in himself. And he dodges competition with other men's works. Further, there is no merit in publication if the author pays for it. Such publication does not prove anything. The author gets a book with his own name on the cover, but he gets none of the genuine joy, the genuine satisfaction of authorship.

What, then, is an author to do? His first and greatest task, it seems to me, is to produce an honestly-wrought manuscript. This is the work every genuine author loves. Such a manuscript would contain, in some form or other, some insight into life, some interpretation of some phase of the universe, some revelation of the wonder of the human spirit. It would give the author a genuine literary experience, just as profound, just as moving

as any religious experience can ever be. It would open to him a new door, a hundred new doors, looking out upon the world's wonders. It would put such an experience, such a revelation, into such form as would make it apprehensible to other men. Here, in this stack of pages, will be the things all men seek. There remains but to bring together the seekers and the manuscript. An author's modesty ought to keep him at some little distance from this transaction.

It is this part of the work that is done by the publisher, and he deserves to be paid for doing it. He renders a service to the author, and no less a one to the reader. He and all of his staff are human beings; they cannot read a genuine work of art without experiencing some reaction to it. This reaction forms a good part of the basis for their judgment upon the work. Thus an author makes his own way with a publisher through his own art. I suppose that a publisher especially well pleased will be moved to offer an especially liberal contract, and vice versa. Without stepping out of his own field, an author can weigh heavily in the negotiations with a publisher.

In addition to being a human being a publisher is a business man. He makes his success by interpreting correctly the needs of his

fellow-men, and by filling those needs. He can be relied upon not to miss the soul-need, the heart-hunger of man, even though there is more money in supplying cheap diversion for the wasting of idle hours. Thus any manuscript that is a genuine work of art will, if shown to enough publishers, inevitably reach its public. For genuine works of art are truly drawn out of genuine authors by the crying need of their fellow-men, in which need they themselves share. And no keen publisher can fail to detect in the atmosphere of his age the magnetism of that pulling force. The author needs, then, only to be guided by all of his faculties in doing the best work that he can. There is no shorter or quicker road to publication, unless one is willing to desert the field of art and to falsify himself in order to earn money.

Of course there are "movements" in the field of literature, given impetus and kept alive by the minor critics, that may operate to shut out a certain writer's work for a long period. But no such surface agitation can have any effect upon the enduring values in his work. Art supplies the most real, the most vital need life has. Art has its fashions and its periods, but always it is art, and there is more joy even in the soul's bitterness of a creative writer than there can ever be in any

other kind of endeavor. Whether it is published soon or late or not at all, an honestly-wrought manuscript does for the writer all that art can do.

There can be no sorrow in an author's failure, if his work is perfect. It is not his loss, then, but the world's. All he attempted to gain for himself has been gained before a word is printed. Beyond this, if other men care to take it up and find joy in it, if other men want to do him honor for his work, he can only have added pleasure. He ought not to allow them to persuade him out of his authorship into something else, however enticing, for he has, in his own right, the best thing that life offers.

IX  
RHETORIC:  
A BLACK ART



## *Rhetoric: A Black Art*

If everything in the universe had clearly one side, one phase, one manifestation that could be accepted as its true nature, then man would have but little trouble in acquiring knowledge and in hastening to his proper end. But this is not so. From our meagre experience with the universe, we can be sure of complexity, if of nothing else, as a characteristic of life. We are sure of a complex world; we are sure of complexity within ourselves. We are sure, too, of motion and change and growth on the part of both ourselves and our world. With this assurance, we know how impossible it is to hope to acquire perfect knowledge. Only a single element in the whole scheme of life can be examined at one time. That element is at once valuable and worthless, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, depending upon how it is looked at. Unless we see at once all aspects of it, then the knowledge we have of it is imperfect. And if we gain imperfect knowledge of many things, we can never, by combining our conceptions of them, arrive at truth.

And it is for truth that a writer is striving—the truth about life. Half-truth and all the other fractional parts of truth are easily



accessible. Only art dares to aim at whole truth.

The creative writer is not only confronted with a universe that presents an infinite number of manifestations to his mind; he is, himself, at any given instant, only one of an infinite number of selves that result from the play of the thinking self upon the acting self. He is subject, in a word, to a great variety of personality-changes brought about by forces beyond his control. It is easy enough to say to the young writer: "Express your personality," but that is very hard advice for him to follow. *Which* personality, pray? No contact that he makes is of sufficient duration to permit him to show forth his whole organization, the whole system of selves of which he is made. He must resort to an approximate representation of what seems at the moment to be the best of his selves. This narrows him, for, after a sufficient number of such representations, he confuses the part with the whole; he acts with relation to a single phase as he should act only with relation to all phases. He drives the whole marvelous mechanism in the direction of a single manifestation that has happened to impress him.

So, too, with the universe. Everything under heaven is guilty of representing itself

to consciousness now thus, now so. Soon or late, we fall into the habit of accepting the thus-manifestation and rejecting the so-. When we do this, we are deceived, and are thrown immediately apart from one another. I accept, as the essence of a given object, other manifestations than those accepted by you. I accept, therefore, a whole universe other than the universe accepted and inhabited by you. We can never, as a consequence, completely understand each other.

Yet we are both impelled by natural instincts to seek understanding of and sympathy from each other. Separated by what amounts to a dimensional barrier, it would seem that our instincts must be wholly thwarted. Yet they are not—wholly. Man has invented an art by means of which he can so *put* his meaning that that meaning may be *taken* by his fellows. This art is rhetoric. Yet that meaning is but a momentary approximation of one of the possible meanings of man, and the meaning that is taken is still colored by the barrier through which it has passed. We have communication, but the problem of complexity remains unaltered. The end we seek is as yet only imperfectly served.

To take a case: I am going to express my meaning to you. But instead of expressing the meaning that is known to myself, I must

express a meaning that can be known to you. I must make such movements as will induce in you such a feeling as I have toward the meaning that is in me. I am under obligation to violate, temporarily, my own conception of the meaning I know, in order to induce in you one that you can know. In the end I am usually content with having given you, not the meaning with which I began my work, but another meaning, one nearer to the barrier that separates us and so more readily sensible to you. The meaning which served as the stimulus to my effort passes with the very effort. I have taken on new meaning. My old meaning will never again fall out to be the true meaning of my mind unless it please an infinite number of working, living, growing elements twice to occupy an identical position with relation to each other. Thus rhetoric is the personality-conveying art; it is the art of the approximation of universes.

One of the earliest definitions of rhetoric is the one given by Plato. He called it the art of persuasion, and satirized it because he saw in it a menace to intellectual integrity. He was not willing to admit that men ought to be swayed. The modern world takes a view more nearly akin to that taken by Aristotle, who defined it as the art of discerning the available means of persuasion in each case.

There is a sharp break between these two. For Plato, rhetoric is the art by means of which I seek to orient and acclimate you in my universe; for Aristotle, it is the art by which I discover how this may be done. The ultimate result is not the same, for, having discovered the available means of persuading you, I may stop there, may leave you where you are, may even decide to go over, myself, into your realm.

The modern world, I say, has followed Aristotle. Scholars of great intellectual calibre have written great books that follow after Aristotle's own classification of the various ways of discerning the means of persuasion. A good scientific literature has been built up for the use of those who follow Aristotle's definition, and great good, as the philosopher himself pointed out, can come of its use. But all this time a thing has been going on quite unnoticed throughout the world. Scholars, proceeding upon Aristotle's definition, have so thoroughly developed the art of rhetoric that it has permeated every field of human activity. And the great mass of the users of that art are not using it as Aristotle wanted them to at all! *They are using it as Plato gave warning that they might.* Whether we accept Plato's definition or not, the modern world is using rhetoric

simply as a means of persuasion. And that modern world can and does draw upon the whole highly-developed scientific literature of the subject, written by men who, for the most part, rejected Plato's definition at the outset. Call it rhetoric, call it what you will, the art of persuasion is the most highly-developed of the present-day arts, and it is the rhetoricians who have made such a development possible.

Simply stated, the art of rhetoric imposes an enthymeme upon that realm of matter wherein all suppositions are partly true, that is, in the realm of the probable. The art, then, consists in the suppression of one member of the enthymeme, and the consequent emphasizing of the other member. Thus, broadly, by placing emphasis upon the goodness of life and totally disregarding the badness of it, we have exercised rhetoric upon it. This does not change the essential nature of life; it merely gives us one rather than another of life's manifestations to contemplate. It keeps us away from the experience of the full nature of life, of the full sympathy and understanding of each other. What it gives us is an interpretation as a substitute for an experience.

In the ordinary run of literature, the writer is seeking to persuade, and you have

not far to look in order to discover that he is either of *this* persuasion or of *that* persuasion. If he does not follow Paul, he follows Barnabas. His code of ethics and his judgments of values shine through his naive network of words. The whole persuasion of the man rides high and mighty through his sentences. He typifies a day and an age because his power is bounded by the day and the age in which he writes.

Rhetoric persuades that the part is the whole, and the particular part that is chosen for this unnatural elevation of state depends upon the persuasion of the writer. At the present moment the dependence of all human institutes upon rhetoric is so apparent that the means of communication are developed far beyond every other department of life. Anyone can easily and cheaply "tell the world" anything. A nobody can as readily command the machinery. We are saddled with the means of communication, and persuasion is in the saddle. This we accept as the lot of our lives, and we let ourselves be persuaded that it is a good thing.

Rhetoric has all but pre-empted the field of religion. Given the license to recognize one manifestation of a fact rather than another, every liberty may be taken with divine worship. Christians who are so by persua-

sion will ever be of this persuasion and of that persuasion. Theology easily becomes a rhetorical quibble. The letter that kills has become predominant; the spirit that quickens is receding.

But it is not here alone that rhetoric encroaches: far more important is the rivalry which this art offers to the ways of looking at life. The creed of the optimist and the creed of the pessimist are alike rhetorical devices. Yet great masses of men waste their years and their energies in singing out these creeds against each other. And the antiphony affords no real satisfaction to either group. On each side of the case, one member of the enthymeme has been selected and emphasized out of all proportion to the rest; now it is the golden horn, now the black one. One side is as near right as the other. What is more important, both are wrong, and both sides have denied themselves the full experience of life.

Rhetoric offers a cheap substitute for poetry, and its followers are forever barred from that sublime interpretation of life which the poet offers. Euthusiasm for life takes the place of sympathy with it. The narcotic, sense-deadening glow of platitudes and the sentimental, tear-provoking drivel that characterizes low verse are in the lives of the masses what poetry could—and would—



be without them. Poems that make you feel good; that make you want to eat a young wildcat every day; that take the place of your morning coffee as a stimulant; that make you fairly whizz through the interstellar spaces; these are the products of rhetoric operating upon the ordinary affairs of life. And each one of these effects is achieved by emphasizing one perfectly true phase of a situation that has a dozen perfectly true phases.

In politics, rhetoric is supreme. The records of competing candidates are rhetorical, the dignity of office is rhetorical, the very state is a concept created by rhetoric. How much depends at the present moment not upon what manifestations of the *res publica* there were to draw from on a certain day in 1776, but upon which of an infinite number of manifestations happened to be put down in a certain document! How much of misunderstanding, how much of hate, how much of war has come about because a rhetorical device came to be understood as standing for a nation! Men cannot hate each other if they know each other entire. It is only when rhetoric is at work creating symbols that can be hated that war comes about.

In business the drift has been out from the real, the actual, into a rhetorical mist that has come to support the whole weight of the

structure, until, at the present moment, the withdrawal of rhetoric would send the whole organization crashing. Everything is done by representation. The business letter-head (but one of many possible manifestations) has come to be the meaning of the firm; the business letter is its dignity, its refinement, its crispness, its honesty, its politeness. This is true in so real a sense that officials unconsciously pick as employees men who will dress and act and talk and live in keeping with the crest upon the letter-head! Advertisements and publicity are the rhetorical mainstays of business, and the whole thing is so elaborate a maze of phrases that it would be impossible for a plain, direct-intentioned person to get to the bottom of it. "Red tape" is often only another name for rhetoric.

Rhetoric is deadening to intellectual pleasure. It stands always between the student and the full concept. It is always selecting, presenting, symbolizing. The cycles of history, of literature, of thinking are possible only by the fact that humanity sees in a given epoch but one set of manifestations of the universe out of the whole number of sets. Tired, then, of sameness, it chooses for a time to select another set, to interpret its world in another set of terms. On and on, around and around it goes, covering the same

ground many times. Today's interpretation is with us, yesterday's is ours vicariously, tomorrow's is ours in prospect. Suddenly we give a shrug, throw off today's, take on tomorrow's; today's slips back and becomes now the vicarious one; yesterday's slips around and becomes now the one in prospect for the next shrug. We are so accustomed to rhetorical lives that we seldom realize that at any given instant all manifestations, all interpretations are present and can be realized. We are accustomed to skip, like stones, over the surface, striking now here now there, never plunging fully into life, never becoming completely immersed and saturated with the universe.

Emotional experience is but a dull and weak thing as compared with its possibilities. We accept a surface indication for the heart of each object, of each experience; we are content to touch and go, touch and go, and so we can never feel the full diapason of feeling. The surface is not the heart, and to touch but nervously is not to feel. We are gladdened by each clear chord: how we should be satisfied with the whole symphony! But no; grief is not grief: it is sackcloth and ashes. Love cannot be love, but only the social institutes that pass for it. Joy is laughter; sorrow is tears. All life is restricted. A

selected part of me, put forth to fulfill the demands of a rhetorical world, experiences a selected part of that world and must even select from the feeling that naturally arises, in keeping with the accepted conventions—all rhetorical. The real I, the real feeling, the real world, we have covenanted not to disturb. We are in the position of the man who is said to have started shingling his roof in a dense fog, and who, when the fog cleared, found that he had shingled all of the roof and some forty feet beyond it, and was perched out there upon a layer of shingles that only the fog supported.

Thus, by exercising the art of rhetoric upon the subject of rhetoric, it is possible to emphasize its darker side and to make the whole subject seem a great nuisance in the world. A persuader would seek here and now to insert a peroration urging the abolishment and eternal damnation of rhetoric from the face of the earth. But, as is true in every case, there is another side to the shield. It is only when rhetoric is used to discover both sides, all sides, of a case that it is given its full employment as an art. And when it is so used, it is the greatest instrument for the discovery of truth that is known to man.

The other side of this same shield seems to me to be so important and so glowing with

possibilities that I have treated it separately and under its own proper heading.



X

RHETORIC:  
A WHITE MAGIC





## *Rhetoric: A White Magic*

The writer of literature is seeking constantly to gain a deeper and a deeper insight into his own life, and a broader understanding of the relation of that life to the universe about him. His writing has, then, touching himself, a threefold purpose. First, it catches and fixes his thought, his feelings and his images. These are vagrant, for they are ordered by his fancy. They come up, range through his mind, and pass, often with no means of recall. It is only by setting them down that he is able to hold them long enough to perfect a system. He is constantly arranging and systematizing them, and so his whole work becomes his whole system: it shows all that he has been able to make out of life. Second, his writing establishes a direct connection for him with his universe. It extends his mind out into the minds of his fellows, and so gives greater range to his thoughts. Thinking with a pen in one's hand gives a greater spur to every faculty concerned in thought. No man who thinks on paper can escape a slight thrill of triumph over time and space. Third, his writing is the direct instrument by which he gains repeated intuitions of himself and of his world.

The words he employs are the spirits, the

ghosts, of the things about him. While he cannot take knowledge of external things save by the appearance those things present to his senses, he can take into the very warmth of his mind the spirit that resides in every known thing. And here, if he admit a sufficient concourse of spirits, will the whole drama of life enact itself by the very fireside of his glowing imagination. The step from mind into matter and from matter into mind is a tricky one: the process is not demonstrable, and hence we may question the validity of anything that pretends to be exact knowledge. But an author steps slowly in the direction of understanding and sympathy by one after another of profound intuitions. Arranging the spirits of things without touching the things themselves, he stays constantly in the realm of mind until his scheme is worked out, his pattern made. This he sets down on paper.

His aim is, of course, the interpretation of life. In order to satisfy the instincts that drive him to this employment, he must make constant gestures in the direction of truth. He must come close to what is the nature of every object, the true significance of every movement, the true purpose of his own being. He is, then, behind all the playing of his art, concerned with truth. And truth, so far as

we can learn, does not lie on the surface. Indeed, I think that mankind has long known that truth lies farther and farther in the direction of perfect knowledge, and is not to be snatched from a few surface indications nervously touched upon.

In our courts of law we have put into effect the best means we know of arriving at the truth. Here two men, equally learned and skillful, seek to persuade an impartial judge of the truth or falsity of a proposition. In such a contest there is certain to be brought forward all that may be persuaded on either side of the case, and the result is that something akin to truth is uncovered. I do not mean that the judgment rendered has anything to do with truth, but that the judge has laid before him an almost perfect knowledge of the facts of that particular case. It is this almost perfect knowledge that is akin to truth, for it generates understanding and sympathy. This is the method that must be employed everywhere, if truth is to be found.

But while lawyers are interested in persuading that one set of manifestations shall be taken as standing for the whole case, writers have no such interest. Lawyers may play with half-truth, each lawyer working on a case with a half, but writers must seek to uncover the whole of it. They must repre-

sent to themselves both sides of every case. No writer may ever be said to have sound judgment who has not the power within his own mind to impersonate his own opposition, and to offer resistance at every step to his own thinking. The art of imagining and constructing violent and prolonged opposition is the art of arriving at truth.

It is necessary, therefore, that a writer be a very direct-intentioned person; that he have something of the imperial about him. For ever and always he must keep urging that the part is not the whole, and this he cannot do unless he go to the very bottom of every matter he touches upon. He must illuminate every subject he writes about; he must give his reader constant insights into the universe. He gains his own insight into the details of life by minute and impartial examination of those details. He illuminates a vital subject by discovering and bringing together its positive and negative electrodes. Thus, by experiencing health and sickness, he takes knowledge of one range of life; so with good and evil, truth and falsity, freedom and bondage. By setting off two extremes in opposition to each other, he leaps to understanding of the true nature of the intervening field. This "leap" is an intuition, an insight, and it is the thing he is after.

It is the thing, too, that he must furnish to his reader. In the getting of it and the giving of it does the art of rhetoric come into play in its true nature. For rhetoric is the art of discerning the available means of persuasion in each case, and it rises to its full stature as an instrument of truth only in the hands of a sincere person. It is only in moments of desperate endeavor that a writer rises to full sincerity. In such a moment he becomes another Jacob wrestling with an angel. In impartially examining the *pro* and *contra* of a situation, he has suddenly got himself into deep water. His own soul-need for interpretive information, for deeper insight, for clearer understanding, becomes his most pressing problem. Though he may have been trying to persuade mankind for or against the proposition, his own honesty of procedure has got him engulfed in it, so that the cocksureness of his arguments will turn bitter in his mouth. He has become in a moment no persuader at all, but a man fighting for his life, or, what is still more earnest, a man fighting for his system of thought. It is thus that the procedure of rhetoric may trap the unwary and force them to be greater than they are.

I said a moment ago that all this happens "in moments of desperate endeavor," and a

little earlier, that the search for truth goes on "behind all the playing of a writer's art." These qualifications were advisedly made, for in the long run of a writer's work his demeanor is serene. We could not ask him to grapple an angel on every page. Were he to do that, literature would be grim, straight-lipped, and pale with effort. There are strenuous battles behind it, but they are for the most part, far behind. It is the recruit who writes with all his armor on, and the weight of it cramps his style. Whatever there is of bitter effort behind a sentence, it ought still to be palatable and welcome to the reader.

And so it may seem that all men—writers and readers—have need of understanding. This need is behind all of mankind's broader movements. Other needs press forcibly and are followed for a time, but the call of this soul-need, though low, is most insistent of all. Man must understand more and more of the wonder of his world and of his own being. He calls this getting nearer to truth. He makes progress by the discovery of new phenomena and by the re-discovery of old phenomena. If it is a new thing he has come upon, he immediately surrounds it with the whole mass of his mental equipment, as an amoeba takes its food. He comes at it from



all sides, laying up to it all such avenues of approach as his mind is furnished with, until he has grown over and around it and has it within himself. By this addition, the whole character of his mind changes. He has, in some small sense, a new mental instrument, a better equipment for the assimilation of the universe. He must go out, now, and re-discover all of the old things in order to correct his understanding of them, for they would not be, to his new mind, what they were to his old one.

The art of rhetoric is a powerful instrument in this process of surrounding and assimilating, bit by bit, the universe. It cannot displace science, for it does not give exact knowledge. Yet it can short-cut the slow, tedious methods of science by burning rapidly to truth and the understanding of it, once science has tested enough cases to give direction to thought. It burns through quickly to profound intuition because it deals with words: it touches only the spirits of things, not the things themselves; and the whole process of generating an intuition takes place in the spiritual realm. Where science needs to make that hard, tricky transition from matter to mind, rhetoric is there before it with an answer which, though it needs to be proved, yet satisfies the soul of man,

But rhetoric is an instrument, too, of transition. The cold, material space between mind and mind can be traversed by it. It is truly the art of the approximation of universes, for by means of it all the minds in the world may be notified of the readjustments which one mind has had to make because of the implications of one new phenomenon lately assimilated. Thus, what one knows, all may know, and the march toward perfect understanding may go on apace. It is in this procedure that the danger of persuasion resides. For the adjustment made by one mind may be, and often is, a hasty and false one, and so, if all minds are to be persuaded to make the same adjustment, all may proceed falsely. To do away with this possibility, there have become attached to the art of literature certain principles which, though they are plainly psychological in their nature, are usually classified along with the aesthetic principles that attach to that art. While rhetoric is, in truth, at the heart of literature, the latter art has thrown up about itself safeguards against the abuses which rhetoric would permit.

First and foremost of these principles that literature has taken upon itself is the *principle of the reader's integrity*. The rule is that *no writer ought to communicate the adjustment*

*he has himself made to any newly-discovered or re-discovered truth.* He ought, rather, to reproduce in words the conditions that led his mind to the particular readjustment he has made. Words being the ghosts of things, he may put into his reader's mind only such a spiritual pageant as will represent all the forces that operated to bring about his own aesthetic or psychological or emotional experience. He may do this in any way, in any form he chooses, but it may readily be seen that the form will be dictated, nay, molded, by the nature of the experience he has had, and of the forces that made it up. Herein is given the range, the breadth and sweep and freedom of literature. Here, in respect for the reader's integrity, does the writer tend to establish his own.

The second principle is the *principle of the author's integrity*. The rule is that *no writer ought ever to make any mental adjustment on the strength of an experience not wholly his own*. In a word, he ought never to put anything on paper that has not moved, normally and naturally, through the full circuit of his mind. This requires that he be himself—"imperial, plain and true"—maintaining the universe of his mind free from the taint of influences that that mind cannot naturally find and accept. If he adhere to these two

principles and follow these two rules, he will be doubly safeguarded against communicating persuasion.

Oddly enough, it is by the correct and complete employment of rhetoric that he maintains these barriers against rhetoric's abuses. He is, in a sense, fighting fire with fire. The two rules require him merely to penetrate so deeply into all the manifestations of every subject he touches upon as to get genuinely upon the track of that subject's true nature. He will then be so overwhelmed with the joy of discovery that he will come out trembling and, like a man who has found a nugget of gold, he will assure the world that the hills are full of this same stuff. Thereupon, all will set to digging. It is this kind of contribution that genuine literature makes.

The writer writes because he has had an experience with the wonder of life—a conversion, a visitation, a gift of tongues. The reader reads because he would like to have such an experience. If the writer gives to the reader the feeling that he is in the hands of a sincere guide and that he will have “secure and restful progress” up to the very gates of wonder, then that writer is producing literature, no matter how unconventional the arrangement of his words may be. Such a writer will hold that the part is not, and

never can be, the whole; that the surface is not the heart; that there is layer upon layer of wonder under the stodgy exterior of everything that presents itself to the senses. With the white magic of rhetoric he will release no end of rabbits from the hat of "any gentleman in the audience." More, he will show his audience how they may do the trick for themselves.

There is a true universe underneath this false one which we are accustomed to accept, and its gradual discovery is the only employment suited to the dignity of the marvelous faculties of mankind. There is a true humanity underneath this rhetorical mask by which we represent ourselves to each other, and its uncovering is the only employment that gives permanent satisfactions to the lives of the wearers. Our hearts are restless and will not be stilled until they can come upon the fullness of life. Whatever the religion, the belief or the method by which we come upon that fullness, it is the operation of the art of rhetoric that lays it bare. Persuasion narrows life by drawing it down to symbols, making smaller and smaller parts seem to stand for the whole. Literature, by investigating all life's ramifications and laying bare all sides and faces of it, gives room for truth and the understanding of it. With art at

work unhampered, we shall one day have an entirely new world.

Ho! See this new world. Every man is concerned with *all* the manifestations of the universe, persuading himself not of life's symbols, but of its completeness. Every man is taking as his life-employment the realization of his own essential nature, spending his time in tranquil speculation upon all the manifestations that occur within himself, and upon all that occur within his fellow-men. There is no longer any *putting* of meanings, but only an ever-alluring search for the meanings that are present and ready to be *taken*. The universe is in the individual; he is packed with meaning; wherefore should he turn his eyes outward for artificial stimulus? His own personality is a touchstone that is true. There is no longer any rhetorical social fabric, but a concourse of individual universes, governed and kept in their places by the same laws that govern and keep in their places the stars. This one toils because he has found that it is his nature to toil. Another one spins because spinning gives him pleasure. One gives off light; another draws the tides. Whether he toils or spins, each one is arrayed in the dignity of humanity, the glory that is his heritage.

Concerning one thing I am certain: that

there is an I, and that I am that I. All the rest is the most interesting, the most absorbing of speculations. I am a mental being, and no physical thing can harm me. Nothing is ever put out at me, shouted in my face, and so I cannot become jaded. Everything everywhere is different, residing within its own peculiar nature, and so I cannot become bored. I go up and down the earth. I do my work, and it interests me, for I was called by my nature to do it. When I have done enough for today, I shall sit down and speculate. My universe sits down with me. I speculate about it. I shall never be done with speculating about it. It is all very interesting. I am serene, tranquil.

















